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F L O R E N C E,

THE BEAUTIFUL.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“LUCILLE BELMONT;” “ERNEST VANE,” &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

THE LADY ELIZABETH DRUMMOND,

THE QUALITIES OF WHOSE HEART,

INHERITED FROM

A LONG LINE OF ANCESTRY

AND TRANSMITTED TO HER CHILDREN,

HAVE BEEN TO ME THE SOURCE OF MUCH HAPPINESS,

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE

THESE VOLUMES.

ALEXANDER BAILLIE COCHRANE.

FLORENCE THE BEAUTIFUL.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOURAINE.

IF there be any one part of France which justifies to its enthusiastic admirers the epithet of “La Belle,” it is assuredly the Touraine. Sheltered from the cold sea-breezes of the east, surrounded on all sides by mountain ranges, the valley of the Loire presents at every turn pictures of unsurpassed beauty and interest; nothing more pleasing than to wander without guide or guide-book through this favoured country; it is little known to the regular

Madame Starke-ridden tourist, and this seclusion perhaps lends to it an additional charm. The iron rail traverses, but has not invaded its repose, peaceful hamlets rest on the banks of the noble Loire, which rolls on its course with the stillness of a strong and mighty spirit conscious of a great purpose. Here commerce recalls to the happy, listless traveller, idling on the river banks, that, separate himself as he may from the world, there are links which cannot be broken, and that even the silent, unconscious river binds man to man, and nation to nation ; but here it is commerce in her most graceful form, such as artists love to paint, and poets to describe her. Large rafts like those on the Rhine, guided with admirable skill through shallows, and over rapids, move along dream-like on the bosom of the rolling waters. Slow creeping barges float down at times lazily and sluggishly ; at others, when the reach of the river permits it, with their swarthy, wide-swelling sails set to catch the breeze.

La Touraine has been called, and not inappropriately so, “*Le pays de rire et de rien faire*,” where the soil is as light as the hearts of those who till it, and the harvest of corn and wine as abundant as man can desire. Each hamlet is in summer time frequented by admirers and artists, some, who truly travel for the sake of art, and others, by far the more agreeable kind, who make their pencil the excuse for travel; but it is rarely that these travellers ever diverge far from the river-side, and there are to be found in general, within a short distance of every post, so many objects of varied interest, that the time devoted to excursions is nearly occupied in examining these. And so it happens that the people of this district are rarely studied, for wherever many travellers are in the habit of passing, national habits are speedily eradicated, but in the interior of the province, where the presence of a stranger is rare as it is welcome, the people retain all their primitive qualities, and these, for the honour

of La Touraine, may be said to be copied from its nature. Here all the tints are soft and mellowed ; distance blends into distance in unbroken harmony ; here are no abrupt effects, no lofty mountain ranges to appal the awe-stricken traveller ; all is soft, genial and peaceful. Such is the character of the people, gentle, mild and peaceful as the climate ; and to climate the character owes more than we at first think, for the severity of the northman, and the gentle indolence of the eastern, alike arise from the climate. Hospitable, as all primitive people are, the traveller is welcomed wherever he appears. Sad to say, that mistrust and suspicion arise from intercourse with the world, but here the people are unsuspecting, because they live secluded. Many a month may be passed pleasantly in visiting scenes of surpassing loveliness ; nor are objects of historic interest wanting, on each side ; châteaux which rival any feudal remains in Europe, frown over valleys, or lie buried abbeylike in their seclusion ; above

all summer, real, warm, glowing summer, smiles over the scene ; the sun, not obscured by fog and damp as in our climate, here delighteth to run his course ; men shade their eyes as they turn towards him, the colours of the distance are so blended by the haze, that at mid-day the outline of forest and hill range can scarcely be distinguished, the veil of glory is cast over every object, softening their asperities, and mingling their beauties.

In the immediate vicinity of the picturesque village of Montrichard, is a spot where four roads meet ; and the traveller, who is merely loitering by the way, anxious to visit the objects of deepest interest, would find himself puzzled which road to select, for each of them leads to some object of romantic or historical importance ; but before he determined his choice he would pause a moment to revel in the contemplation of the beautiful scenery which there bursts upon the view. It is said that the only defect in the character of the in-

habitants of this neighbourhood is, that they are naturally indolent ; nor is this surprising, for where nature has done so much, we can scarcely wonder that man should do so little ; but, though most beautiful, the prospect here is not extensive, no very lofty mountains intercept the view, but the ground undulates with endless variety, as if each vineyard were gently heaving towards the rich clusters of grapes, which bend towards the bosom of the mother that bore them. Here again, wild acacia hedges, luxuriant orchards, a picturesque confusion of hollow heath and height, while they limit the prospect, leave nothing for the heart to desire ; but to prevent a monotony even of beauty, bright ridges of yellow corn peep through the foliage, lightening the scene like smiles on the lips of the beautiful.

Whoever has once stood on this spot, must recall it oftentimes, for there is not within the boundary of the Touraine a sunnier vale than that of Montrichard.

Amid all the busy, ambitious scenes of life, the remembrance of this sweet spot breathes a repose which the worldly and the ambitious may well pine for and envy.

CHAPTER II.

THE CROSS BY THE WAYSIDE.

IN the centre where the four roads meet, there stood a Cross.

It was a Cross primitive and simple as the faith which it represented, among these peaceful, lowly people. The travellers, from whichever side of the country they chanced to be journeying, paused for a moment at its foot in gratitude or love. There was no attempt at any fanciful carving ; simple, of plain, unornamented wood, like that which saved the world. But this absence of all

decoration or symbol did not arise from neglect, for wreaths of immortelles hung around it, and these were constantly renewed. There they were, emblems of that piety, humble as its offering.

It would have furnished matter for curious and not uninteresting reflection, to have watched and judged the various characters who bent their knees before it, in the course of each day ; but most beautiful was it to see the old man, when he laid aside his hat, and the whitened locks fell over his shoulders, as he knelt in prayer ; or the young child, clasping her tiny hands, as she hurried through her short supplication, and then reverently crossing herself.

It had stood, that Cross, for many long years ; it had survived, like the faith of which it was the symbol, many shocks, many dangers. But it was soon to be uprooted ; for at this date, the spring of 1789, the days of mourning and darkness for France were at hand. The moss-grown

wood had long braved the furious tempest the thunder-stroke and the lightning's flash, but it could not defy the passions of men.

It was a bright evening in early spring, and after a shower in the Touraine, can anything be wanting to complete the dream of beauty? Standing by that Cross, the first object which presented itself was the little village of Mont d'Or, worthy of its name, to judge by the yellow fields of waving grain by which it was quite surrounded; in the distance the château of La Tour Beauport, stood like a proud monument of that feudal character and age, to which it owed its foundation, at a time when men possessed high and noble ideas of great works to be performed in their generation, and the spirit to realize them for the benefit of succeeding ones. But between the château and the village, a distance of some three miles, the freshness and softness of spring breathed on bloom and blossom; high hedges and nar-

row lanes, such as Love and Hope frequent in their youth, rendered back in fragrance to the atmosphere, some of the beauty which the scenery owed to its glorious tints.

It was an evening for Hope to anticipate a happy morrow; so soft and joyous that, like the dreams of youth, we think they can never pass or grow old, or the glory of such a sunshine sink into darkness. It seems that, at eventide, there is always in Nature a sweeter perfume, rose tints cover the heavens, and there are low, soft murmurs of many insects. Bride-like, the earth and sky appear to be more lavish of their beauties, as the night draws on apace. And is it not so? The morning dawn may be like manhood, bright and vigorous, the pulse beats high, and the brow is erect; but it is in the evening that the nature of all men is softened and subdued, and that the heart beats more warmly for others, it may be, perchance, more warmly to others.

But the world is not without, it is within us; it must be so, or it were impossible that, on such an evening, a broken heart could be kneeling at the foot of this time-worn Cross. But, after all, what to the sad heart was the bloom on the tree, or the blossom on the flower? With her soul concentrated in one emotion, indifferent to all external impressions, a broken-hearted, world-driven woman, with a fair young girl by her side, prayed for a strength which the world cannot give, but which we know at the same time the world cannot take away from us.

It was a picture not ill adapted to the scene; the stillness of nature, and the stillness of prayer, the mystery of twilight, and the mystery of the heart: there was some sympathy between the actors and the scene. It suggested thoughts removed from ordinary curiosity; or the earnest attitude of the woman, and the singular grace of the young girl, must have excited attention; but, as

it was, the few people who drew near to bend the knee, kept at a reverential distance, as though unwilling to intrude on the heart's deep expression, and then passed on, at once unobservant and unobserved. One poor girl, indeed, as she wended her way, perchance with a deeper affliction at heart, turned when she had advanced a short way on her road, to gaze on the group at the foot of the Cross. It may be, that her heart beat in harmony with their's; and as she recalled the weeping Magdalene, she learned in her sympathy for others to mourn for herself.

After a short time the mother turned towards the young girl, who had dropped her hand, and now sat at her feet, on one of those worn stones, which testified by their appearance to the piety of those, who knelt upon them in their progress towards their devotions. The mother and daughter rose and sat on a bank covered with flowers, which afforded a more extensive view of

the surrounding country. Not a word passed for some time between them. The daughter gathered some of the flowers which were near her, and from mere thoughtlessness, or from depth of thought, picked off the buds, which fell at her feet. She seemed subdued but not unhappy; and from time to time looked into her mother's countenance, as if anxious, but unwilling to ask the cause of this sorrow.

“Mamma,” she said at last, as if desirous to break through this painful scene, “I thought you told me that, if you came into the Touraine, you would be then happier. You know,” she continued, with a smile, “you have often blamed me for giving way to feelings, and yet how unhappy you appear.”

“Florence, it is true I have cause to grieve, both for you and for myself.”

“Not for me, mamma,” said Florence; “I shall be much happier in the country than in Paris. I’ve led so lonely a life

lately ; and a large town, with a constant movement, is even more solitary and lonely than the country. But then this scene is so full of beauty ; if you will only live in this neighbourhood, mamma, I will promise you never to be dull or melancholy. It would be quite happiness for me to watch the beauty of the scenery, as we do now."

"I hope, Florence, we shall be able to live here," said her mother, trying to smile, and she passed her arm round her daughter's neck, to kiss her fair cheek.

It was beautiful to see love between two who were in themselves so lovely, for the mother's age could not exceed five-and-thirty years, only it seemed that womanhood had brought with it more than its usual share of responsibilities, sorrows, and broken hopes ; her noble and sad-looking brow was shadowed by luxuriant dark hair, gathered into one large bandeau, and borne to the back of her head in that graceful sweep which we know classic

beauties loved to adopt, for classic sculpture has transmitted it to us. Her cheek was as full, and the chin as dimpling as the daughter's who sat by her side ; the fixed gaze betrayed the deep interest of her thoughts. Beautiful as the prospect was, those thoughts were evidently far away. Even in this rural spot, her dress recalled the memory of the scenes she had left ; it was on the whole far better adapted for the atmosphere of the Chaussée d'Antin than for a woodland valley in the Touraine. Every article was scrupulously neat ; but the least shrewd of observers could at a glance have detected that it was not made in the provinces, and it possessed a nameless simplicity and grace which all nations strive to attain to, but in which the French alone succeed ; for the truly impartial must admit that the French have the happy facility of rendering art subservient to woman's grace. Every article she wore seemed to belong to her, as though the

fashion could never have been successfully worn by any one else ; she did not, however, follow the prevailing habit of powder, which was by no means of universal adoption in the provinces ; over her dress, which was black, a light cloak was thrown, and the road to Montrichard could seldom have presented so graceful a scene, as the group on the bank of flowers on this warm spring evening.

So it appeared that others thought, for a man, who had been engaged in his prayers, while he allowed some cows, which he was by way of attending to, to crop off all the vine-leaves from the top of the bank, stared at them for some time in a kind of mute astonishment, with one hand half-raised, as if inclined to touch his cap, with the other going through the monotonous occupation of knocking off the heads of some thistles.

There is something magnetic in an intense gaze, and both the mother and daughter

turned towards the man, who looked confused as though he had been detected in an improper act. However, taking off his cap, he stammered out that he was ordered to meet the lady who had sent on her luggage from the diligence on the road to Tours, for a boy was waiting with it at La Belle Etoile.

It was Florence who answered :

“ Mamma, Monsieur has come to tell us that the luggage has arrived at the inn—is it not so, Monsieur ?”

The man bowed, and looked again at the group, but immediately turned away his head, for he saw that the cheeks of her whom he had addressed were bedewed with tears. And there is at all times, and in most hearts, regard for the silent dignity of sorrow.

“ How came you to look for us, my friend ?” she said, seeing that, after another uncomfortable pause and a second awkward bow, the man was about to leave. “ And

how did you know what road we had travelled?"

"Ma foi, Madame, it is not so often that strangers visit Mont d'Or," replied the man. "Sometimes we have the grand carriages of the Grands Seigneurs who travel post crack, crack, crack, through our little narrow street. Madame Blanchard looks after them—trust her for that—although they generally drive direct to the Poste, and seldom stop at La Belle Etoile; or the marquis himself sometimes passes, and, diable, he makes them travel fast enough. Then there is Mademoiselle de la Pompière, in her magnificent carriage; but except these and some artist who sketches the old château, or any pretty girl he may come across— Pardon, Madame! but artists like to sketch pretty faces."

And here he burst into a silly laugh, whether at the recollection of sundry passages in his life, or because he had involved himself in a soliloquy from which

it was impossible to extricate himself, it were difficult to say.

“ But you have not told me how you knew by which road we were to be expected ? ”

“ Ah, by the bye, I forgot this, Madame. But you know— ” and here he looked a little confused, while he readjusted his cap, and completed the sacrifice of sundry nettles he had beheaded. “ What I mean to say, Madame, is, that when any one does arrive at La Belle Etoile, it is a great event. So we asked the boy who brought the luggage, and he told us that two ladies had left the diligence on the road about two miles distant, and rested in a house, saying that they would walk to Mont d’Or ; and then you see, Madame, that I looked at the boxes and read the address. It is quite natural—is it not ? It was evident that Madame had come from Paris, because all the boxes from Paris are marked with the name. So I said to myself: *‘ Pierre,*

you will do well to go and meet these ladies. Perhaps they may require some one to show them the road.' So I told Madame Blanchard what I intended to do, who told me it was all right."

"And who is Madame Blanchard?"

"You do not know Madame Blanchard! Madame, how should you? She is a good woman—every one knows Madame Blanchard, and likes her—gentle as a lamb; and for the poor, *ma foi*, I have seen, when old Blanchard—and he was not really old—but we call every one old who is married—why, when old Blanchard was alive, the kitchen was quite an hospice. Nothing was too good for the poor. As for poor Pierre—that is myself, Madame—I had a hard life of it, running about to look after all these vagabonds. Since Madame Blanchard—"

"Thanks," said the lady, with a movement of impatience, which showed that her thanks were intended to express enough.

“ Does Madame Blanchard keep the Belle Etoile ?”

“ Yes, Madame.”

“ I am happy to hear it, for we intend going there.”

It was evident that if, by leaving the diligence at the junction of the high roads, the lady had intended to elude the curiosity of the inhabitants of Mont d'Or, she had singularly failed in her object ; and at the recollection that her name and recent residence were now known in the village, the colour mounted into her cheek as she rose with a movement of impatience, and said :

“ Let us proceed, Florence.”

At that moment, a butterfly of more than ordinary beauty lit on a rose, which grew in wild luxuriance in the hedge. Florence sprang forward to catch it like a mere child as she was ; and an expression of sorrow passed across her countenance, when the beautiful insect flew to the other

side, until she observed that the rose was one of that deep, blushing, kind which the soil of the Touraine produces in fragrant abundance. Then she plucked the rose, and reverently placed it in the centre of a fresh chaplet, which some young children had hung that morning on the Cross after a village wedding.

Whether it was that her mother shrank from observation, or that she was acquainted with a shorter road to the Belle Etoile, she led Florence down a narrow lane, which turned to the right, immediately before the road entered the village. The man who had commenced the conversation had, up to this time, accompanied them, leaving his cattle to ravage all the banks and hedges, while he evidently proposed to conduct them to the inn; but when they came to the turn of the road, a kind but dignified bow of the head checked his intended civility. He paused, as if in

astonishment, at this sudden dismissal, and then muttered to himself :

“ She has a daughter more beautiful than an angel, this Madame Brinville ! ”

CHAPTER III.

MADAME BRINVILLE.

A VERY few moments brought Madame Brinville and Florence to the garden of La Belle Etoile, which extended some little way at the back of the building. She must have been well acquainted with the locality and with the arrangements of the house, for, in place of going at once to the principal entrance, she opened a small wicket, which conducted, by a narrow gravel walk, to the back-door; but when she turned round, after having closed the gate, she saw a middle-aged, neatly-dressed

woman, who was occupied in examining the progress of the bees in a glass hive. On hearing footsteps, she turned round suddenly; but her attitude of surprize and inquiry was soon exchanged for one of respect, as she contemplated the grace of Madame Brinville and the beauty of Florence.

“Are you Madame Blanchard?” inquired Madame Brinville.

“Yes, Madame,” replied the hostess, dropping at the same time, in her attempt at a curtsey, some of the roses which she had been gathering, and was carrying in her apron. Florence ran to pick them up, and was about to replace them in her lap, when Madame Blanchard prevented her.

“No, Mademoiselle, keep them,” said Madame Blanchard. “In-doors I will get you a piece of thread, and tie them up for you. You will come in, will you not, Madame?”

“I have come for my luggage,” said Madame Brinville. “A boy brought it on

here from the Tours diligence. You will have seen the name on the boxes ; it is Madame Brinville."

" Oh ! Madame Brinville," said the hostess, and she dropped a curtsey even lower than before. " But Madame must be tired with her long walk ; she would like to rest herself ; and this dear young lady, she too must be fatigued ;" and the good woman took Florence's hand, who pressed hers kindly, for she was pleased with her voice and manner, and the flowers which she had given her. Moreover, that greatest of all charms, a kind and gentle voice, won her heart immediately. The young and innocent are the best judges of character ; they can detect deception in the voice, and falsehood in the glance, when the ablest diplomatists might be deceived.

Madame Brinville was touched, and she thanked Madame Blanchard with a warmth of manner, which showed that such kindness was of rare occurrence to her.

“Does Madame intend to remain a long time at Mont d’Or ?” asked Madame Blanchard. “If so, I could accommodate her with two rooms, which look into this garden ; and as they are on the first floor, there is a beautiful view from them. Perhaps Madame will come up and see them ;” and forgetting the dignified ceremonial of the landlady, in her sympathy with the strangers, she opened the door for Madame Brinville, and preceded her up-stairs into a room, when at once the windows were thrown open, and assuredly Madame Blanchard had not exaggerated either the neatness of the apartments or the beauty of the view which they commanded.

The rooms were small, and nothing could be plainer than the furniture. Each possessed an alcove in which a small bed was placed, and plain, white curtains, which in the daytime were drawn across the recess, gave to the whole an appearance of cleanliness and comfort that no finer material

could have conveyed ; tables, a few chairs, and chest of drawers, was really all the furniture which they contained ; but these were kept so scrupulously clean and zealously polished, that the most fastidious person must have been satisfied with them.

The floor was of that rich, dark colour which all good *femmes de ménage* in France strive to obtain ; a piece of carpet laid under the table in the centre of the room, and a small stove, proved that even the Touraine is not wholly exempt from the mischances of the season—from winds, and frosts, and autumn chills. Each of the rooms possessed the usual decoration of a clock, supported on either side by vases of anything but classic shape. These, like the clocks, had been purchased at one of the fairs from one of those itinerant merchants or pedlers who barter at every village, in their progresses, and, with their wares, are regarded by the village children as the embodiment of Oriental magnificence, and bearing with them in

their packs the fabled riches of Haroun Alraschid.

The walls of one of these rooms was covered with a quiet, sober paper ; on one side, opposite the window, hung a print of St. Jerome, as he is always represented, in a long monastic habit, fastened round his waist by a cord, a small rosary in his clasped hands, with his eyes turned to Heaven in the attitude of prayer. Beyond this masterpiece of village art, the walls were, like the mantel-piece, indebted to the itinerant merchants for their decoration. There were two coloured prints of Louis XIV., one of them representing the grand council which was held when Philip of Anjou was proclaimed King of Spain ; another the entry of the Persian Ambassador into Paris.

This, with a small mirror, completed the decoration of the bed-room ; but the next, which was intended for the sitting-room, and possessed a fire-place, was more highly ornamented ; the walls were covered with

that bright old French paper—which modern innovation has discarded, but which, after all, is gayer than that which has replaced it. Groups of peasants sitting under trees, or some Orpheus by the side of a very blue lake, delighting the woodlands and wild animals with his melodious pipe ; very pink hills in the background, and very bright skies overhead ; and then immediately swept onward troops of mamelukes or janizaries in the gaudiest apparel, scouring the yellow plains after imaginary foes.

The chimney-board represented a Bedouin bargaining at his tent door for the sale of his favourite mare, while in the corner of the tent, pistol, firelock, sword, and shield were thrown together in the most inextricable confusion. The floor was polished, even to a higher degree of intensity than the other room, and it was with conscious pride that Madame Blanchard threw open the door, and, having cast a careful glance round the room to see that

everything was in its right place, looked into her visitor's countenance with an inquiring gaze, as much as to say, "Madame will be very well here."

But it was the view from the window which at that moment occupied Madame Brinville's attention. By a wise arrangement the back of the house, in which the best rooms were situated, looked to the south. The front into a little narrow street, scarcely worthy of the name, but which the loyalty of the inhabitants had distinguished with the appellation of La Rue Royale. The point of view was the same as that which Madame Brinville had been contemplating so long from the hill-side; but here the objects were brought much nearer. At the foot of the garden was a tiny rivulet, which fretted and struggled like a wayward child, hurrying forward to join the great river of life; a bank rose abruptly from the edge of the stream, and on every available spot of ground the vine was planted, while here and

there pieces of the naked rock peeped forth, and moss and wild heather mingled with the graceful vine. A large meadow, of a green so bright that it indicated more rain than the inhabitants of Touraine would be disposed to allow could fall, extended far away to the foot of a noble wood-crowned hill, forming a part of that immense forest which is spread over the whole country from Chambord to the neighbourhood of Tours.

At the end, as it were, of a point of land stood the old château of Tour Beauport, built in the sixteenth century, of a dark grey stone; it was stamped with the appearance of more antiquity than it could really lay claim to—a long, huge pile, turret-laden, the numerous towers and pinnacles seemed to overlook the loftiest branches of the ancient woods which clung to its base. The centre of the château formed a broken line, which undulated with the ground on which it was built; for our simple ancestors adapted their buildings to the ground on which

they were erected, whereas we endeavour to make nature yield to our fancies. The few windows and heavy projecting eaves conveyed an impression of melancholy not at all in accordance with the surrounding scenery.

It was not such a structure as buoyant youth conjures up, but a fit habitation for the lovers of the marvellous, and calculated to strike the observer rather with awe than pleasure; but if the centre wore this sad and melancholy appearance, on the other hand, one of the wings, which had been recently added, conveyed more agreeable impressions. Without departing from the picturesque style of the old French château, it had been adapted to the ideas of modern comfort. A wide terrace ran along the principal story; and even from this distance it was easy to see the graceful and light balcony, by which it was protected. The incongruity, if indeed the eye of the practised artist could have detected any, was only that of youth and age, in which the likeness is

preserved, at the same time that the contrast, though striking, is far from being unpleasing. From the modern wing of the château an avenue of chesnut-trees swept down into the valley ; and their proud, rounded tops stood out in relief against the sky, as though they were the conscious guardians of the place.

It was not, however, the stately château, or the neat odour-breathing garden beneath the window, that occupied Madame Brinville's attention. All her gaze was concentrated on the valley, where two or three picturesque cottages were scattered about ; the luxuriance of the gardens, and the beauty of the glades, proving that the spots had been judiciously selected for the richness of the soil and the advantages of situation. The most distant of this group was attached to one of those beautiful old buildings, remarkable for their admirably mullioned windows, their projecting eaves, and quaint water-spouts. The lofty, steep, sloping roofs,

and queer old gables have been long since adopted in the old Scottish mansions, but had their origin in Brittany and La Vendée, although they may be traced in some of the manor-houses in the west of England.

One portion of this time-hallowed structure was almost buried in ivy and honeysuckle, but whoever occupied it was possessed of that quality of refinement—good taste; for the roses, instead of being permitted to grow wild, and thus conceal the beautiful stone-work of the windows, were trained along the walls, although here and there, as if to show their power and ambition, they clambered up until they joined the roof. The porch, which was evidently of very recent date, was not quite in character with the rest of the building, but any architectural deficiencies were concealed by the clusters of roses under which it was buried. It was to this spot that all Madame Brinville's attention was directed.

So concentrated was it, that it seemed

as if she were anxious to discover from the form of the building the traditions which belonged to it — if erected some centuries since, when men looked backward to their ancestors, and desired to leave some memorial of their love of home to their descendants. What changes must that structure have witnessed ! How many the tenants of those rooms, in which the huge rafters had accumulated the dust of ages ! What various groups round that hearth, where the wide seats invited the whole family to gather near the blazing wood, and the fitful blaze cast its vivid light on the rude decorations of the hall ! How many eyes had looked forth from those beautiful oriel windows ! How much youth had perhaps wasted itself in sweet and passionate dreams upon the green bank, which in terraces of formal symmetry sloped down to the glen-side, doubtless preserved less for their beauty than for their associations.

Madame Brinville's contemplation was not

extended to the whole, or indeed, to the most picturesque portion of the structure ; she was gazing on a small window, which peeped forth from its bower of tendril and blossom. She pictured herself as a young child, sitting at that window, listless and idle, in that stillness which for youth and beauty is sufficient excitement. She seemed to see a cage with some favourite bird hung from the window-sill : to hear voices not harsh and loud, but gentle and soft as the voices of love, when they speak of their home. Again a few years, and the blossom of the child had changed into the bloom of girlhood—in that glorious state in which nothing in life is long permitted to remain, out of the bud, but scarcely in the flower—the rose which we select, before its beauties are all unfolded. The picture her fancy drew was one, which an artist would have endeavoured to depict and a poet to sing. The whole countenance fraught with hope, the lip full and trembling more in

love than in sorrow, the eyes lit with such intelligence—such as though, to her soul, the word had been uttered, “Let there be light,” and the light broke over her spirit, soul, and feature; or again another picture, with her handkerchief tied round her head, sitting on the terrace, beneath the acacias’ shade, listlessly reading, or fashioning her life into tales of love and romance. Dream followed dream; and as the evening breeze swept by, it wafted to Madame Brinville the memories of long years. While the glories of that twilight were blended with the sunshine and shadows of the past, how long she sat in that position, she knew not; but she was startled by the sound of her own voice as in youth. It was Florence, who had been in the garden; and seeing her mother in an attitude of contemplation, had stolen gently behind her, and said:

“Mamma, you are still unhappy!”

It was quite true. Madame Brinville

wept as only those weep, who mingle in the same flood of tears their passions, and regrets, and repentance. She looked up for one moment to Florence, and endeavoured to force a smile; but the effort was too painful, and the grief too deep, for again she buried her face in her hands, and the hum of joyous spring was interrupted by her sobs.

At this moment, Madame Blanchard knocked gently at the door; and hearing no answer, she entered the room.

“Madame is ill?” she said.

There was something in the voice of that kind landlady which touched Madame Brinville. Sympathy wins so immediately the affection which it claims. The lady of fashion, before whom the golden youth of Paris had at one time bowed, took the hand of this new and simple acquaintance, and pressed it to her heart. The touch of sympathy was mutual. Madame Blanchard remained silent for a few minutes, and allowed the feelings to

express themselves in sighs and in tears ; and then there followed a few kind offers of sundry remedies which the good lady thought must, in some shape or another, be adapted to the hysterical disposition of her guest.

Madame Brinville, by the slightest possible shake of the head, had declined them all, when suddenly she moved her hands from her face, and taking Madame Blanchard's hand in her own, she pointed to the old manor-house just described, and inquired if she knew who resided there.

It seemed that when Madame Blanchard came to Mont d'Or, the place was untenanted ; but, a few months previously to this conversation, a young married couple had arrived there. The man held some situation in a public office at Tours, and, although frequently absent from home, he always seemed so happy to return, and his wife to see him back again, " that," added the tender-hearted Madame Blanchard, " it

always brings tears into my eyes to recal the happy days I passed avec ce pauvre Blanchard."

"Then you have not been here long?" asked Madame Brinville.

"Oh, no!" replied Madame Blanchard. "Jacques kept an hotel at Tours, in the Rue de la Ville Evêque. It was a magnificent hotel, and he became bankrupt. The house was sold, and we retired here to this pretty little spot, where, thanks to some kind friends, I get on very well. The marquis and his family come to see me constantly; and in the fishing season they send me a great many customers. If Madame only knew what an excellent trout-stream it is—there is nothing like it in the Touraine. We are preparing some for Madame's supper."

And again sentiment and commiseration were merged in the good housewife.

Madame Brinville smiled at the earnestness of the kind efforts of the hostess to

comfort and distract her ; and, at her earnest request, she again descended into the garden, where Florence was sitting amid a perfect wilderness of wild but beautiful flowers.

“ Madame Blanchard will not thank you, Florence,” said her mother, “ if you rob her of all her flowers.”

“ Oh, it was not I who picked them, mamma !” said Florence ; “ it was Mademoiselle—”

Madame Brinville turned, and saw a girl of about Florence’s age sitting in an arbour. She was dressed in white, even to her shoes, and there was not one shade of colour in the dress to vary its monotony. A small net contained the hair at the back of the head, while a few stray locks, which fell over her shoulders, showed how long it would have been, had it been permitted to float at will. The face was full of interest for one so young ; there was an air of fixed melancholy—and the peculiar,

sad expression of the eye proved that the child had felt some of the shadows of maturer years.

When Madame Brinville looked at her, she rose, and then, for the first time, she observed two crutches lying by her side. An expression of annoyance flitted across the young girl's face at Madame Brinville's inquiring glance. It was sad to see so youthful a person suffering under such an infirmity, and Madame Brinville was, in a moment, recalled from her own melancholy but selfish impressions. She pretended not to see the cloud on the girl's face, spoke to her in the kindest voice, put a seat for her near Florence, and then turned, in a low voice, to inquire of Madame Blanchard how long the poor girl had been thus afflicted.

"From a child," was the reply: and then the good woman added in a low tone: "She is, Madame, a brother's child. He married very early in life, and then went to sea, to the

West Indies, where he was carried off by the yellow fever, leaving this poor, crippled girl to my care. He was always an excellent brother to me, so I determined to do my duty towards her. She is good, kind, and gentle, as any girl can be; but you see that she is but of little use. Sometimes she has tried to attend to the cows; then they stray, and she is unable to run after them, and I am forced to employ a boy to see that they are safe, at least two or three times a day, so as you may imagine, there is a great expense in keeping a boy on purpose. But she has a kind heart, and such a good disposition; every one must love her in spite of her infirmity; poor thing, I took her once to the doctor at Tours, who says that she can never recover. Marie," called Madame Blanchard, "come and speak to Madame."

She placed her crutches under her arms, and approached slowly and painfully. The colour was still in her cheek, but her eye was calm and meek. Madame placed

her hand on her head, and stroked the beautiful hair with a hand as kind and gentle as though she had been her mother.

The night was closing in apace ; even the hum of busy insect life was dying away. Long streaks of orange and purple showed where the sun was sinking into his glorious repose ; while the topmost branches of the forest trees were still surrounded with a halo of light, against which the dark bed of foliage stood forth in relief as in a golden frame ; the ripple of the burn, as it murmured amongst the pebbles, appeared to grow louder with the stillness of evening : the good-night of each peasant rung on the air like heartfelt blessings ; it seemed that the flowers exhaled a richer perfume ; that the night-breeze was more soothing than in the daytime : it is said of the blind, that deeper and keener perceptions are bestowed upon them to compensate to them for deprivation of sight, so on the night doth it seem that nature sheds sweeter and gentler blessings of repose and

stillness, to compensate it for the absence of the glorious light.

Florence and Marie soon retired to rest, presently asleep under the same roof were two young girls, to both of whom, even as children, the world had assumed a scornful aspect.

Two children, while yet so young, destined to lament the affections which cherished them ; and that love, which should be as light to the universe, overshadowed their cradles, and darkened their destinies.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOMESTEAD.

Once beloved and self-respected,
Give me back all thou hast taken,
God's own love for man's forsaken,
God's own love for man's rejected.

From winged dreams of fancy bright
I wake, but only wake to weep;
Like one, who, murmuring in his sleep,
Wakes with hope, then finds it night.

Sadder than night my soul, for morn,
On dreariest winter always breaks,
But heaven's sunshine oft forsakes
A heart like mine so tempest worn.

So give me back my peace again,
Or bid my spirit love thee less ;
My love to thee is bitterness,
To me it is e'en harsher pain.

It was scarcely six in the morning when Madame Brinville rose ; yet even at that early hour the whole valley was radiant with the joy of the morning. A light haze rested on the meadows, but the tops of the stately pine, the pride of the forest, and the wide-spreading branches of the chesnut, appeared above it like islands on an ocean. The base of the château of Tour Beauport was shrouded in vapour, which rose curtain-wise, until it enveloped tower and pinnacle, and then dispersed itself into the blue atmosphere. There was every promise of a warm and sultry day. It was a day to call forth happiness, and on which the happy would have selected the brightest colours from their wardrobes, as most in harmony with her sensations. Not so Madame Brinville ; she chose a dark dress. She could not prevent

the elegance of the fashion, which was so well adapted to the form of the wearer, but in every other respect she evidently endeavoured to study the greatest simplicity. So soon as she was dressed, she sallied forth, not to the garden entrance, but into the street. It was Sunday morning, so no one was astir. The hard labouring men were resting after the repose of the week, and snatching some moments of that greatest blessing which nature can bestow — repose of mind and body. Madame Brinville walked quickly, and looked round frequently, as if anxious to escape observation. She had her prayer-book in her hand, and, therefore, whoever met her might have concluded that she was on her way to some holy office of religion in a neighbouring parish.

After following the road for about a mile, a secluded lane led down to the old manor-house, which she had contemplated with so much interest on the preceding evening. A sudden turn of the road brought the house

in full view, which had until then been concealed by the garden and a bank of evergreens.

Here Madame Brinville, whether overcome by the heat of the morning, or by the pace at which she had walked, turned very pale, and paused a few minutes, clasping her hand to her heart, as though to still its beatings. She must have been well acquainted with the grounds ; for she walked on until she came to a small orchard, where a path, rich in all variety of flowers, led to a fresh, trickling spring, which, after being collected in a small vase, flowed from its lips in a gushing, purling rivulet to the burn at the foot of the garden.

Madame Brinville seated herself, screened by the shrubs from the observation of any one in the house, while through the foliage she could in some degree trace the outline of its architecture. There, seated by the fountain, the soft trickling of the water fell like a wondrous symphony on her soul, she

seemed to recal all the past, as drop by drop, it sunk into the overflowing basin, and then flowed languidly away like a monotonous existence, the lights and shadows of memory flitted across her soul. Oh ! these memories, how they crowd at moments upon the brain ; long-forgotten years, words no more remembered, thoughts and visions we fondly or sadly imagined were long since entombed and grass-grown, sounds of loved voices, even the very odours of the Past sweep, Æolian harp-like, through our hearts, borne by the breezes which fanned our youth.

As Madame Brinville sat there, it seemed that each moment was fraught with its inspiration ; two hours had passed away, and the light breeze blew across the meadows the sound of the village bells.

Without a mental effort, her thoughts reverted to the day of her first communion, when, clothed in white, as emblematic of innocence, she had knelt with many of her

young companions at the altar. She saw as though it were yesterday the kind old curé, and felt the touch of his hand as he laid it on her head, pronouncing the blessing of the Church.

Then her mind, by a sudden change, passed to scenes far different, to the graceful fashions of a great city, and from these again to the vast interests of a mighty nation, with which her own individual troubles were as insignificant as the rivulet, by which she was sitting, was to the rapid river which flows through Paris.

Then her own loveliness in golden youth, her vanities, the features which allured while they gratified, the words of love, the sweet confidence, the silence and stillness of two hearts beating in unison, the maiden affections, all passed before her. There was a sad gratification in renewing all these impressions; she felt that she was repeating her youth, re-entering the portals of that new world which Paris had

opened to her view ; the friends who had bid her welcome were again standing by her side—Elise, who had been her earliest friend, and received her with that winning confidence which is the life of young hearts, a confidence which on an evil day was fully returned, and of which she ever repented.

Involuntarily, she then looked at a locket which she always wore, and gazed on features which it required no locket or picture to recal, and she remembered when she had first seen them. It was on the occasion of a visit to Fontainebleau. There was a party of young men and maidens, all about the same age, on one of those brilliant days which make Paris the queen of cities. They had passed all the morning strolling through the noble forest ; wild glen, fantastic rocks, and green alley had been all visited in turns ; and the fancies of many were filled with thoughts of love which bud like violets in the spring.

On that occasion one was present unknown to the general society, for he was of higher rank, but invited by a friend, by one of those accidents apparently so immaterial, but on which the destinies of life depend. Elise, who was acquainted with him, presented him to her friend Louise, and from that moment he never left her side. It was the sport of others, even amid their own interests, to watch her dawning feelings. It was not surprising that the young man singled her out from amongst the rest ; they were all, it is true, graceful and pretty, with those gentle manners and happy negligence, which achieve triumphs art cannot attain to ; but in Louise there was a languor of expression which lulled the heart of those that looked at her into repose, a lip pensive, but which sometimes sweetly smiled, rather, as it were, from sympathy than from inward gaiety. Her figure gracefully undulating, gave to her step, when she walked, a stateliness of womanhood which the girlish-

ness of her countenance belied. She looked one of those whom poetry and imagination claim as their own, one of the favoured beings, who furnish the romance of the many and the felicity of the one.

How often has the tale been told ! how often will it be told ! how many have walked, as on that evening, through fragrant glades, when the deepened glow and quickened breath were felt, although unseen ; how throughout that day he never left her side, for an instant ; for long hours, which passed like moments of time, when, apart from the rest of the gay society, they strolled side by side, and not a word was spoken except when, to break the silence, her companion sometimes called her attention to the streaks of brilliant light, which darted through the branches of the ancient forest trees, and the sunny gleams which here and there peeped through the confusion of trunk and stem, or pointed out to her, as the haze, from the heat

of the day, rose in fantastic shapes, the spire of some distant church, or the ruin of some old tower, which had usurped some portion of the wildness of the forest.

Strange, that all this should have appeared to be without danger even to herself, but, in truth, this sense of security originated in vanity, and an overweening confidence in herself, of all perils the greatest. She forgot that ever and ever

“ Danger shall be

In the hour, that thou deemest securest to thee.”

But, besides, at this very time she was engaged by her parents to marry a cousin, who resided in the vicinity of Bordeaux. He had paid her frequent visits at Mont d’Or, and was deeply attached to her; in compliance with the wishes of her friends, she had consented to marry him. Indeed, this visit to Paris had been permitted on

the plea of its being a wedding visit to some relations who resided there ; and, to do Louise mere justice, she was led away, as so many are, by slow and imperceptible degrees ; if, in the first instance, the visits of M. Langeac were remarked by her friends, they soon ceased to give rise to comment—habits of intimacy are so easily engendered. Friendship, sisterhood, were the topics spoken of, for Elise had warned the young man of Louise's engagement, and these were the names by which she designated her affection in her heart and in her prayers :

“ Spesso l'amor sotto la forma
D'amistà ride e s'asconde,
Poi si mischia e si confonde,
Con lo sdegno e col rancor.

“ In pietade ei si transforma,
Par trustullo e par dispetto,
Ma nel suo diverso aspetto
Sempre egli è l' istesso amor.”

She did not notice that, whenever he came she sought the garden, which, small as gardens mostly are in Paris, and overgrown with weeds, seemed to her, when he was sitting by her side, more beautiful than the sylvan shades of her own Homestead; she did not notice how she told the minutes until his arrival, and how many hours a day were passed in pensive idleness, and in reading and repeating over and over again the words he had uttered, as if she were counting the beads of the rosary she wore.

He was in appearance worthy of her, and, as we have said, of far higher birth—the son of Baron Langeac, a new title, a new family, but of great wealth. His father had made a large fortune in trade, and his son at that time filled a lucrative situation in one of the offices of the *fermiers-généraux*, and it was understood, would soon succeed one the most eminent of those avaricious gentlemen in a prominent situation.

At the period when he first met Madame

Brinville, or, as she was then called, Louise, he was remarkable among the extravagant youth of his day, and possessed that nameless, and sometimes really unaccountable fashion and *prestige* which, like all mystic and irregular qualities, exercises so great a fascination on the imaginations of the young. Is it, therefore, surprizing that Louise was at once captivated by him? Is it less surprizing that she carefully concealed the fact, except from her one friend, Elise?

There was a book from which she loved to hear him read, for his voice was gentle and low; many passages of this book were marked as expressing in language far more impressive than any she could command, the feelings nearest her heart, albeit eloquence is the child of true feeling; and then there were flowers, and bits of moss placed between the leaves, and each of these possessed its separate interest, but all relating to the one object that filled her mind. He used to read chapter after chapter, and she sat

there in heart attentive, but idly, or to conceal her emotion, sometimes tearing a flower to pieces ; and as he read, his voice would falter, and the colour of her cheek would deepen. Once he paused suddenly, and then unwittingly he took her hand, and at the touch her whole frame trembled, perchance he anticipated the reply, when in a low whisper he said : “ Louise, do you love me ? ” and she murmured : “ Yes, for ever . ”

Call it Love, dignify it by what name you will, but the question will be asked : Is it love for the sake of self, or for the sake of the woman ? Surely that word cannot be prostituted to self, which cast a bright light even on the darkness of the middle ages, which gave its name to the holiest feasts of the Church, which lent to the minstrel his harp, and tied a kerchief on the arm of the cavalier. Surely that word, if any word, possesses a signification deeper and holier than many imagine. It must

be associated with tenderness for its object, with something of gratitude towards her who has called forth the noblest qualities of the heart. The poor Indian worships the sun as the source of warmth and happiness, and of that light which penetrates into the darkness of the forest ; and must we not bow before that mysterious power which sows within our hearts the seed of all its best fruits, and is as light penetrating to the darknesses of the soul.

Is it possible, save in a moment of madness and delusion, to descend from the dignity of this noble passion, to degrade the glorious image of her we love ? Is this not to uproot the flower which has blessed us with its beauty, and gladdened us with its perfume, to plant wild and noxious weeds in its place ? Is it not to remove the cross from the altar, and replace it by vain and unworthy idols ? Surely, whatever the temptation to sin, there will flash across the

heart of a man so tempted, the infinite perfection of the thing he is about to destroy, and pity will enforce those claims of mercy which love urges in vain.

CHAPTER V.

VISIONS OF CHILDHOOD.

STILL the fountain never ceasing, trickled on, after she had with M. Langeac left her home, forgetting her vows and promises. Counsell'd by the false friend Elise, in an evil hour she consented to marry him, only to learn soon after the birth of Florence, that the marriage was a delusion, and that he was wedded to another. Since that time, how many had landed on death's silent shore, how many had left that homestead for the lasting mansions of the dead. Her father and mother had died, and not from old age. Bitterly had they lamented the false step

which she had taken, wronging a worthy and noble-hearted young man to whom she had been long betrothed for one of most indifferent reputation, and when they learnt the truth, the blow was fatal to both.

Years rolled by, and then it was that, bearing a different name, she thought to return to that home she had left now eighteen years since. She longed to see again all those spots she had so loved in her youth ; hence the cause of her visit to Mont d'Or, of her sorrow, of her interest in that spot. Eighteen years had passed, eighteen years of her life's history. She left her home in the spring, and in the spring she returned again, and all around her seemed unchanged in its beauty. Here was the garden she once delighted in, not a spot which had not its interest, and which was not associated with her infancy or girlhood. That little plot of ground, bounded by the stream, contained within itself, to her mind, as much beauty as any one heart could enjoy. Tour Beauport and La Palice had, it is

true, larger gardens, richer fountains, many more flowers, but what matter? As she looked around her, when the bitterness of thought was quenched, the dew of her youth seemed again to refresh her heart. In a secluded spot she remembered, there was a fairy little house, made of shells, which she had built with one of her young companions. She recalled as though it were but yesterday, how carefully she had selected the spot, so that her mother should not discover it in her daily walks ; and yet her mother knew it well, but with what special care did she, if she passed it perforce, pretend not to see it.

Madame Brinville rose to discover if this slight relic of the past remained untouched. She went straight to the place, and there indeed it was, even a light fence had been put round it for protection ; probably her mother had done this, but at all events, those who now occupied the house, had respected this monument of affection. Here,

then, was the Eden of her early life ; and as she gazed around, the freshness and bright hues of youth's morning, which so rarely expand into noonday, fell upon her ; there were the graceful ash trees, the sweet, flowing lilac ; even the rustic seat on which she had so often idled away the day, or where her mother, when the weather was hot and sultry, took her work, while she sat at her feet reading some fairy tale, on the issue of which she hung with breathless interest. Then, in addition to the local interest attaching to each spot, were the recollections of sweet and kind words, such as pure and holy affections can alone inspire ; there was the place where forgiveness had been asked and granted for some light and venial omission, but which, in those days of innocence had, to her eyes, assumed gigantic proportions ; and close to the fountain was a walk which passed through the garden into a small adjoining copse, where, on the morn of her departure to Paris on her

marriage visit, her mother had led her, in order to give her that advice which was to guide her through the dangers of that new world she was about to enter, but which was interrupted by many tears shed by both. As she stood there again, the full conviction of her loneliness in spirit as in body flashed on her soul. The old homestead, her father, her mother, her friends had all passed from her—she was alone in the world, in the world without her God.

She threw herself on the bench, and wept bitterly.

Sob followed sob unchecked; but suddenly she started at the sound of some one approaching. A man was coming along the path that led through the wood. She could not be mistaken in his hobbling gait, the broad shoulders bent with age; it must be—it could only be the old gardener, Joseph. Yes, there he was, in apparently the same waistcoat he wore on Sundays eighteen

years since, elaborately decorated with the brightest flowers, for it had once belonged to a set of curtains, and her mother had cut a piece off them to make him a waistcoat, which on fête-days was the glory of the parish church. Surely all the intervening time was a dream; she was still a girl, and this was her home.

She did not then consider that so marvellous is nature, that no single impression, no thought, no word ever perishes; that years may roll by, but the old man retains within himself, and unknown to himself, powers of memory some day to be revealed to him. All that the cunning of modern art can accomplish, all the marvels of Mesmer, of Weisshaupt, or Cagliostro resolve themselves into this, that they can so entirely cast the mind into a state of vacancy, that it can receive whatever impression is chosen to be conveyed, provided it has once passed through the brain of the patient, but one spot known to childhood, one note of music,

even one perfume will produce the same effect, and vision after vision of the past will arise to the recollections of those who thought them long since entombed in the past.

“ Joseph !” she exclaimed.

The old man looked round to see whence the voice came. Presently she heard him say :

“ Mon Dieu, it was certainly the voice of Mademoiselle Louise. Mais comment donc, mais ce n'est pas possible,” and then when he saw her, there was an expression of delight that gladdened Madame Brinville's heart.

He drew near the seat, and then he observed how much she had been weeping ; and the kind old man, without precisely divining the cause, felt the tears fill his eyes, as he recalled the many years that had elapsed since they had met.

“ Ah ! Mademoiselle Louise,” he said, “ I never thought to have seen your sweet face

again. Ah ! what happiness ! They are good people who live here now ; but your father and mother, how good and kind they were ! She was an angel ; and as for him, he was quite revered, as though one were to say he was treated like the archevêque when he went out. When your poor mother died, Mademoiselle Louise, the whole village followed her to the grave ; and old Olivier, who you remember, Mademoiselle, as the sexton, told me that he sold on that occasion more immortelles than he disposed of in any one month. And then you, Mademoiselle, every one wondered that you did not come home again—by the bye, pardon, Madame, I forgot we heard that you had married. This made us all very happy, but it would have done us more good to have seen you again as I do now.”

As he spoke, each word was a dagger to her heart, and yet, as in Northern climes, when a fire has burnt down the forest, fruits and flowers spring into life again from

the ashes ; so in this heart, fresh hopes were springing from the waste and decay.

“The soul’s dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.”

It is ever found that the darkest hour of night is next the morning.

“And who resides here now ?” asked Madame Brinville.

“It is very extraordinary,” said Joseph ; “it seems that it was almost intended for Madame, if she chooses to take it. The young people who resided here left only the day before yesterday ; his father died, and he was forced to return to Bordeaux ; they were very sorry to leave it. I do not know, I am sure, whether they will return. La Petite Angèle left me her birds to take care of, as if she hoped to come back ; but as his father was a wine-merchant at Bordeaux, he will probably be compelled to reside there ; and if so, Madame could purchase the place, or hire

it at a very low rent. M. Ponthieu, to whom it belongs, lives at a very short distance."

As Joseph continued, Madame Brinville's countenance was radiant with light. Every heart, like Petrarch's, seeks some Val Chiusa—some spot where it can repose, and live in the past instead of the present.

In a moment, with a woman's fondness, and faith in destiny, she imagined the place her own; she rose and visited the room where as a child she had played, and as a girl she had felt. If she could but realize this purchase, she thought she could be again happy. She would people the solitude with the voices of the past. To her every spot would have its interest, even the very stream would recal the youth that had flowed with it into the eternal waters of Time; and for a moment, in this state of mental activity the flame of happiness seemed to burn again with something of its former glow, like meteors which owe their splendour to motion, but

die away when they are in rest and repose.

The hours sped by, and it was long after noon when she returned to La Belle Etoile. With her heart composed and chastened, for a time she had forgotten the world, and its systems and its forms ; she had suffered, but it was a suffering which ennobles while it saddens, for it was mingled with love for others ; and the tears were tears of affection.

CHAPTER VI.

LA TOUR BEAUPORT.

WE are told that this is a great age, and the age of great cities. Pre-eminently we will admit that it is the age of vast cities, but how far these cities deserve the epithet of great, is another question. If the character of an age or of a nation is to be judged by its architecture, the present age—and, above all other countries in the present age—our own falls far below the standard of excellence. The cities, vast emporiums as they are, stand on the surface of the soil ; but they have as little pretension, and offer as little resistance to the ravages of time as those

painted canvas towns, which were placed on the horizon, when the Empress Catharine of Russia travelled, in order, in her rapid progress, to give her an exalted idea of the populousness of her dominions.

Commerce is the magician which in all times has, with her magic wand, called great cities into existence ; but commerce is in these days more selfish, more exclusive, less generous than of old. She does not keep her state in marble palaces ; and the great merchants are no longer the merchant princes of the nation. Thebes with her hundred gates, purple Tyre, imperial Carthage were the offspring of commerce. The tideless Adriatic and the azure Mediterranean wafted commerce to the stones of Venice and the marbles of Genoa ; then it was that men possessed noble thoughts, and could greatly realize them.

It was the proud boast of the great Cæsar that he found Rome brick, and left it marble. We are content to leave nothing but

bricks to our descendants. But it is not only in great cities that there is a change; Faith and Charity no longer win the earth wanderer by the same noble structures. The beautiful abbeys, where formerly Faith knelt at the altar, and Charity bade welcome at the gates, are now left to claim our love and sympathy only from the glory of their ruins; and where are the noble châteaux and princely towers, which, while they added to the pride of illustrious lineage, protected the lowly who loved to dwell beneath the shade they cast?

How seldom is it that in these days we see raised such a glorious pile as that of La Tour Beauport, or as it was more generally and briefly styled in its neighbourhood, Tour Beauport. Built on a point of land which juts forth like a promontory into the vale, it overlooked a vast extent of plain, and many streams, which flowed on gently like happier natures, fertilizing and blessing in their course. The gloomy forest spread its vast masses behind it along the ridge, and then

expanded fan-like till it blended with the distance. The dark sand-rock on which the château itself was built, served as a solid foundation, as well as a defence, to the structure which it supported.

Within a three-mile circuit there was no hill that could command the castle; and therefore, even in the days of formidable artillery, it was well calculated to stand a siege. Clustering at the foot of the castle were a few houses placed against the sand-rock, which, while they availed themselves of its strength, appeared from a distance to give it some support—a not unapt illustration of serfdom in the middle ages, which rendered back to the feudal baron some of the support which it owed to his countenance. In front of the castle, at a very short distance, was a steep bank, on the top of which were the ruins of an old abbey almost concealed by the wild forest trees, and the luxuriant underwood which had sprung up in those courts and cloisters, where a genial hospitality had

formerly been exercised, and vespers were wont to be sung.

The Abbey of Briare had long flourished under the protection of the Seigneurs of Tour Beauport. A subterranean passage was said to unite them ; and report, ever free with the characters of feudality, pretended that some of these puissant barons, after violating all the canons of decency and religion, were wont to avail themselves of this passage to seek absolution, and sometimes even sanctuary, when justice did—as it rarely did—venture to penetrate into the wild forests, which in former days overspread the whole valley as far as the Loire.

The massive turrets of the old château, the fantastic spouts, which, in the shape of griffins' heads and grotesque mouths, after a heavy flood almost poured their waters upon the roofs of the houses below, the heavy parapet at the top, behind which were planted watch-turrets, serving at the same time for warders to warn of

danger, as well as to guard the avenues, in the event of an enemy approaching along the ridge of land—all this was a confusion of building not very picturesque in detail, but very successful in its general effect. In the centre of this vast pile, and carved out of the same grey stone of which it was built, were the arms of the family. The fleurs-de-lis were cut in such gigantic proportions, that they could be plainly distinguished from below, and testified to the importance which the family De Soligny attached to the drops of royal blood that flowed in their veins. These fleurs-de-lis were blended with the quarterings of half the noble houses of France, the De Montmorencis, the De la Trémouilles, whose arms have so frequently added illustration even to the emblazonment of royalty.

To support this heavy shield and the numerous devices, on one side stood a wild Hungarian with a massive club, who certainly was calculated to impress beholders with

terror, if any dared to defy the motto, "Gare qui touche." And on the opposite side, in strange contrast, stood an angel with an olive-branch in the one hand, while the other rested on the shield. In the days of the wildest period in the annals of the house of De Soligny, one of the barons was disposed to discard the angel as of too peaceful a character, and to replace it by a wild boar, or some other savage emblem of his nature. But the venerable fathers in the neighbouring abbey were so outraged at the idea, that they threatened to anathematize him every Sunday, if he did not leave the angel in peace; and all he could manage was to get rid of the olive-branch, which he regarded as a tacit insult (but which the milder piety of some descendant restored), while he satisfied himself by adding every possible rude quality to the unfortunate Hungarian.

On a large tablet, again, below the shield,

the style and titles of the first Baron de Soligny were distinctly visible. There men read how the first baron, in the thirteenth century, was Lord of Selles, of Chevilly, of Mont Louis, Briare, and Clermont ; that he was hereditary Capitaine des Gardes de Sa Majesté Très-Chrétienne, et Commandant-en-chef of the Frank Archers. Moreover, although he had despised the mediation of the angel, he did not scruple to engrave the prayer, “ that God might hold in his Sainte et digne garde, le Premier Baron de Soligny.”

Whether all these assumptions of rights, styles, and dignities were well founded, may be doubted ; but, on one occasion, a neighbouring count, very much annoyed at the incessant persecutions which he endured from this Christian baron, boldly proclaimed his undue appropriation of many seigneuries. But unfortunately for himself, he had not power to maintain this heresy ; and the bones, found in one of the dun-

geons, were the only memorials of his having fallen a victim to his candour, after having, before his death, under promises of a most favourable nature, not only recognized the Barons de Soligny in all their old titles and as many more besides, but also making over to them all the châteaux and their appurtenances belonging to himself, and swearing that he made all these submissions, declarations, and relinquishments of his own free will, and gratefully acknowledging the kindness and attention that had been shown him by his friend the Baron de Soligny.

So this episode in the history of the barons entitled the founder of the fortunes of the family to the gratitude, if not of the public, at any rate of his descendants.

The approach to this strange and stately pile, was by a gradual slope through the wood. At the top a clearance had been made, not

only to show off the castle itself, but also to protect it against any sudden surprise. A large court-yard was entered by a draw-bridge, which, even in these modern times, was drawn up every night, and the whole forms of pass-words and of watch and ward were duly gone through, partly because the present marquis liked everything which reminded him of his feudal descent, and also because at this time the state of politics was not such as to give confidence to the possessors of castles. The court was surrounded by buildings; three sides were occupied by the inhabitable part of the castle, and the fourth by stables, capable of containing half-a-dozen squadrons of the chevaux-légers, which the present marquis formerly commanded in his capacity of Capitaine des Gardes. The more modern wing of the château itself was approached by an archway, and a long descent was guarded by two portcullises, proving that, whoever erected

the more modern structure, did not possess such confidence in the times or in the efficacy of the guardian angel who protected his shield, as to reject the wise precautions of his ruder ancestors.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CASTLE OF LOCHES.

It was in the evening of that Sunday which Madame Brinville had passed in the garden of the old manor-house, that the present possessor, no longer a baron but a marquis, was walking on the terrace which ran in front of the whole of the modern portion of the building. The said terrace was filled with flowers, which the first baron would have hurled with contempt at the roofs of the houses below, as proofs of shameful effeminacy. That such was not, however, the mood of the marquis, was evident, for from time to time he stopped to pick a flower

and to remove a dead leaf from the walk ; and the apparent interest with which he looked on the prospect showed that he was a great lover of nature. Nowhere could he have indulged this passion better than here ; on the one side, clusters of dark green trees mingled with wild blossoms climbed up to the foot of the terrace, and beyond the terrace a wide expanse of plain extended in broken, undulating ground to the banks of the Loire, which might be seen, as it were skirting the horizon, and winding like a stream of silver round the landscape ; on the other, the view was bounded by the rich country in which the village of Mont d'Or was situated, and there was something striking and beautiful in the appearance of this valley. The sounds of village bells were borne by the breezes across the meadows, the green vines clambering to the hill-tops contrasted with the fields laden with golden spring flowers ; the cottages peeped through the foliage in which they were buried ; so still and quiet, it seemed in such a place there could be no room for passions, no self-inte-

rests, no ambitions, no vanities, but only those gentle qualities which render home beloved.

The vein of thought which was passing through the mind of the marquis was apparent from his glancing up from time to time from the lowly cottages to the sculptured arms, whose emblazonment we have described ; then walking to the extreme end of the terrace, he looked down on the deep curtain of rock which formed its security from the ravages of nature and of man. He had just returned from the chapel, where the monuments of his ancestors, some in armour, and others in ecclesiastical dress—for the De Solignys had not disdained to give their younger scions the advantages of sundry abbayes and cardinalships—had recalled to him the splendour and havoc of the past. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as he stood gazing on his wide possessions, and observed the strength of the proud castle which he called his own, something of sadness should have filled his mind at the idea of the glory of such a life, and the uncertainty of its tenure. But still, while

his thoughts were glancing in this direction, there was so much kindness and benevolence in his look, that it did not seem he could be long abstracted in melancholy contemplations.

He walked to the end of the terrace, and there he was joined by the Abbé Louis, who generally officiated at the castle on Sundays and high fête days. They stood opposite an opening which had been made in the wood, and through which, far away in the distance, might be seen the outline of the Château of Loches.

“Now, Abbé,” said the marquis, “you have not been here since that wood was cleared away ; look steadily, and you will see Loches ; it is no less than ten leagues from here. You will scarcely guess why I made this opening ; I will tell you. It was that Henri may always learn a moral lesson when he walks this terrace, and see the prison where his grandfather passed the greater part of his life.”

“M. Henri has told me the whole history,” said the Abbé, “and it is a sad reflection that any monarch calling himself très Chrétien should have been guilty of such atrocities.”

“No, no, my friend,” said the marquis, “kings may be like other men, and nobles too like other men, and my ancestors were neither better nor worse than the majority. They conspired against the king when it suited their purpose, and he put them into prison when he caught them. The fact is, Abbé, I fear that in my great-grandfather’s time the nobles were little better than a set of freebooters. Society was differently constituted to what it is at present: we,” and here the marquis raised his plumed hat, “pay all honour and reverence to the sovereign. I cannot, Sir, with my feelings, understand how all these great illustrations have from time to time been banded together against the crown, and too frequently led by princes of the blood.”

“Perhaps on the principle of schoolboys,” said the Abbé, smiling, “that of breaking

windows. You remember, marquis, that the followers of the Prince de Condé were nicknamed *frondeurs*, on account of the sling, the child's weapon, with which they were armed. But we must admit," he added, "with all deference and respect to the principle by which His Most Christian Majesty reigns, that formerly, from time to time, each in its turn, all classes had good grounds for irritation ; at one moment it was the nobles, just at the present time it is the people. Besides the power which, even when it was not abused—the power of a *lettre de cachet* — how contrary to the spirit of that love of freedom which nature and education have implanted in the hearts of all men !"

"Oh, for that matter," replied the marquis, "a series of *lettres de cachet* were as necessary as the emblazonment to the nobility of a house. The chronicles of the Bastille and of Loches were as aristocratic as those of any palace ; and in those days, I believe that state prisons were

not what we imagine them to have been."

"And what do you imagine?" asked the abbé. "Have you ever visited Loches, Sir?"

"Once," said the marquis.

"Sad enough—sad enough on a clear blue day," continued the abbé—the marquis nodded assent—"when the bright sun shines through the crevices which Time has made in these frightful dungeons; but I have seen it by night, and what I then saw, no fancy could picture. I thought," continued he, crossing his arms reverently on his breast—"I thought that I almost heard Heaven's curse pronounced on the head that could plan, on the skill that could erect, and on the cruelty that could people so horrible a solitude."

"What were you doing there one night?" asked the marquis.

"Not one night—many nights!" replied

the abbé. "If you remember, Sir, about ten years since, a man was sentenced to death for a most atrocious murder; and he was confined, after his trial and condemnation, in the castle. I was at that time on a visit to a friend in the neighbourhood of Tours. It so happened that he was sent for to attend this criminal. He was very ill, so I undertook the painful duty. When I arrived, and was introduced to his cell, I found a raging blasphemer, not possessing one idea of repentance or of religion. I determined to devote myself to that man's salvation until his death. I did so, and, thank God! he died, so far as I could judge, penitent; but these days I shall never forget!"

"What, you heard mysterious wailings, and saw ghosts!" said the marquis, half-smiling.

"It is true, I saw fearful sights," continued the abbé. "It is true that the

walls gave forth mysterious sounds—the echo of sufferings long since undergone. Some day,” and here his form dilated, and the colour mounted to his cheeks—“some day to be revenged! You know, Sir, the White Donjon Tower, with its massive ramparts, which beetle over the precipice? Well, the poor man I speak of was confined there. It matters not that while I inhabited the prison no state criminal was expiating the crimes of ministers or the vanities of royal mistresses. I knew the history of Loches well, and peopled it with sounds, until my heart felt like lead. Vast and gloomy corridors lit by mere slits in the wall, practised less for the advantages of light than to show the captive the thickness of the fortress in which he was confined; vault over vault, and subterraneous passages, fit monuments, in their blackness and gloom, of the hearts that constructed them; massive stones everywhere seemed to entomb the soul,

and every door to shut out that last blessing of life—Hope.

“But this description, you will say, is universal, and not peculiar to one prison, and that misery, solitude, and sorrow are its natural occupants; but Loches represents the refinement of all cruelties; standing amid those horrible vaults, where the light of day and the sun’s warmth never penetrates, I recalled the times of Louis XI., when this prison was crowded with the suffering, dragged there by the vanity, the caprice, and the cowardice of one man. Yes, all the pitfalls and the terrors which we are told, in those days, surrounded Loches and Plessis, well represent the approaches to thrones; and well, indeed, would it be were all men to avoid them. Have you a conception, M. le Marquis, of *cachots*, placed below and below each other, into which the victims had to be lowered by ropes, and there supplied with barely sufficient food to sustain life; and

the only light which ever broke upon them was when another prisoner passed through the dungeon into one, if possible, more terrible; while, to enhance the torment, some even in these dungeons were suspended in iron cages.

“There Cardinal Balue expiated, by a terrible existence, the iniquity which invented and which gave his name to these cages; there Philip de Comines learnt to estimate those punishments, of which he could treat so lightly; there, at one time, when tyranny struck high and low, the best blood and the humblest of France mingled, if it mingled nowhere else. While I was there, a van with a prisoner arrived. I heard, at midnight, the shrill cry of the guard, the draw-bridge was lowered, the rattle of the lumbering wheels echoed from court to court. My room was at the top of the White Tower, and I could catch a glimpse of the prisoner as he was taken out, by

the light of flambeaux, and led to his dungeon. I felt that there was an errand of mercy for me, so I rose to breathe comfort to his soul.

“I passed rapidly down the stairs and through the large hall, which was surrounded by three benches, round which formerly the judges used to sit when such a mockery of justice was enacted, but down which now the damp was slowly dripping to the floor, and settled in large patches of mildew on the walls. I saw, in the distance, the reflection of the torches of the soldiers, and had just time to catch a glimpse of the features of the poor wretch, who was driven ruthlessly into his cell. His horror-stricken glance will ever haunt me. The gates were soon closed on him, all the bars were drawn across, and his moanings grew fainter and fainter as the dungeon was left in the distance.

“It was on the same evening,” he continued, “I remember with a horror of

which language almost fails to convey the idea, three hours of mental agony which I passed within those walls. On my return, I found that grey morning was breaking, and the poor wretch condemned to die was to be executed at ten. One of the guards conducted me to his cell, where he was lying in a sleep of anguish — at least I concluded so, for his whole frame heaved and groaned at each breath of the sleeper — chained to the wall by one arm and leg; all his other limbs were convulsed, and his hands were clenched in the bitterness of despair.

“He recalled to me that fearful type of suffering, the Prometheus bound, only the vulture was gnawing at his soul, and not at his body. His complexion had caught the damp, sickly, livid hue of his cell; his pitcher of water had been thrown down in one of his paroxysms, and the water was flowing around him, but he heeded it not; some crusts of black bread were lying

near him, which he had evidently striven to eat from sheer hunger. When I entered, he turned his head slowly round, and his eyes gleamed with all the intensity of delirium. Vainly I tried to preach to him the words of comfort and of truth; his only answers were groans, and these were wrung from his despair.

“Finding that everything was useless, I placed my lamp on the floor, and reflected that, horrible as all this was, at all events, in these days, there was one comfort, that torture did not add its horrible pangs to this load of misery; when suddenly turning round, my eye was attracted to a stone door of immense weight, which swung on a concealed hinge. One of those strange fascinations peculiar to some states of mind seized me, and with an effort I rose and opened it, while, for its immense weight, it moved with incredible facility. I took the lamp and entered the cell, where, to my infinite horror, I saw arranged on the

walls all those instruments of torture which belie the intelligence or the civilization of those men, who laud the darkness of the middle ages. On the floor were the staples to which the feet of the prisoners were fastened, while their arms were attached to a block in the ceiling, and on this rack the frame was stretched until nature was on the point of extinction; there were the instruments for the *peine forte et dure*, and others which it would weary you to mention.

“How long I sat there I know not, for I was quite buried in fearful and sad meditations, and no morning light could penetrate to break my reverie. Presently my lamp flickered up like expiring life, and then I turned to leave the cell, when, to my horror and terror, I found that the door was closed upon me. At first I thought that my unaided strength could open it, and then I remembered having heard that these doors could only be opened

by means of a peculiar instrument—so cunning was the instrument, so refined the tyranny.

“Overcome by a paroxysm of fear, I shouted until the echoes of my cries in this dreadful cell alarmed even myself; a cold dew sat on my brow, and my knees were seized with tremblings. It is true, I was well persuaded that the guards, who knew I had entered the cell, must at an early hour take means to release me; still the idea of this imprisonment alarmed me, and the shadow, as of the grave, fell upon my soul. Hours—or rather minutes that seemed like hours—passed; pale and ghastly visions rose before me—dull, cold and dreary glances gleamed upon me. As I sat on the stone bench, the cold iron that had fastened many a perishing wretch to the wall, seemed to pierce my flesh. Then it was that, in mockery as it were, I recalled the days when François I. received his treacherous guest, the Emperor

Charles V., and I imagined all the gay scenes of the royal palace, which at that time stood in the centre of the square. There met on that occasion youth and beauty, grace and chivalry; the feet that beat to measure, and the hearts that beat to love. And then I remembered that they danced over such dungeons as I was at that moment confined in, and that the echo of the joyous fête was the groan of the suffering.

“ Presently, with a wild and irresistible expression of delight, I heard the sound of a grating instrument, and then a voice which sounded like a whisper; soon the clang of axes rang on my ear, and after a long delay, the door was cut through. Unhappily for human nature, the secret instrument for opening these cells of torture had been lost (they closed of themselves), so that the whole door had to be wrenched away. Again I stepped forth into life, my footsteps falling like my voice, when my ears were saluted

with a hideous laugh, and with one finger pointed at me, the poor wretch doomed to die in a few brief moments told me by his attitude the secret of my incarceration; he had, by a desperate effort, reached the door with a hunch of bread which lay by his side, and so admirably were the doors hung, that at the first touch it closed, while all the efforts I made to open it only fixed it more irretrievably.

“And now, marquis, I will pass over all the misery of that morning, I have been led away by my feelings to say so much; it must have been experienced to be understood; no one can adequately describe it.”

“It is wonderful and terrible,” said the marquis, with all his attention fixed on the château in the distance. “I only saw a few of the vast apartments when I visited it, but I can fully appreciate all you tell me.”

“Ah!” said the abbé, with a deep sigh, as if his heart had been relieved by the account

he had given, “ with what joy did I leave the château, after the terrible scene was completed. I went forth into the light, after a soul had been hurried forth to meet its God. It seemed as if a new life now filled my pulses ; gate after gate closed after me, and I stood under the rays of Heaven’s own sunshine. All nature, animate and inanimate, was radiant with its warmth ; the guard were lying idly reposing at the outer gate ; far down in the valley the light smoke of many a happy cottage curled in fantastic shapes ; dark forest, purple hills, and purling rivulets, blended their beauties. I turned to gaze on the pile I had left, strange, solemn, and grand in its conception and its execution ; the massive white ramparts, again protected by others behind them, and supported by high buttresses, glared in the sunshine with lurid brightness. There was a chapel on a hill adjoining the castle, which I entered. It was very small, and it contained windows of painted glass, which had been broken in

pieces in stormy times, but which modern art had combined again in such a manner that, although it represented no perfect idea, the general effect was one of extreme beauty. In one of the aisles, on a low pedestal, was a kneeling figure, which no heart save one which was full of devotion or love could have rendered so beautiful : it represented a woman in early youth, of exquisite grace. A sweet, sad smile dwelt on her lips, such as hearts wear which have cause for sorrow, and yet possess an inward peace. She was on her knees, with her head bowed as in prayer, while two angels expanded their wings over her, and one seemed to breathe into her ear the language which called forth that smile. On the ground lay a lily, which she had unconsciously broken ; but its seed appeared to have taken root, and fresh flowers to spring up at her feet, from the remains of that which she had destroyed. Then I recalled the frail compliances, but the almost redeeming qualities of the gentle

Agnes Sorel, a broken lily, indeed, but winning others to virtue. Well might she exclaim: 'If I had loved my God as I have loved my country, I should have been blessed.' "

"I am not sure," said the marquis, "that I stopped to look at that monument; but how comes it, Abbé, that the Church admits within its precincts a memorial of one whose life was passed in error?"

"Strange," said the abbé, "that such should be the general feeling, and that the Church is less intolerant to the erring, than that very society which was the original source of the error. Agnes Sorel made her love her god, and worshipped it; but none more bitterly expiated their sin. Do you remember Sir, the beautiful remark of Madame de Neuilly, at one time mistress of Louis XV.? Going to mass when the crowd on the steps was very great, a friend begged some young officers who were standing there to clear her a passage. 'Comment donc,' one

of the officers remarked, 'pour une telle femme.' 'Messieurs,' said the fallen but penitent and humbled woman, 'Messieurs, puisque vous me connaissez, priez Dieu pour moi.'"

The marquis turned suddenly, for sundry recollections flashed across him, and for some time he paced the terrace in silence.

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CHAPTER VIII.

MADEMOISELLE DE POMPIÈRE.

THE marquis and the abbé soon after turned to re-enter the castle, at the first sound of a bell which pealed forth from the central tower, and bore far and wide on the breeze the important announcement, that the dinner-hour of the château had arrived. In the year 1789, the preparations for dinner were less elaborate than those which modern civilization enforces. When the dinner-hour was invariably three o'clock, there was less inducement for ladies to be so lavish in the country of the resources of the Victorines and Camilles of that day; after dinner the gentle-

men rode and the supper which answered to our modern dinner, was too light and informal to require much preparation. Whether the present system is more refined, and calculated to improve the tone of society by requiring more preparation for it, and without which preparation society is too apt to degenerate, is not a point which we are prepared to discuss; the only object in calling attention to the fact, is to explain why it was, that on the present occasion Mademoiselle de Pompière entered the large dining-hall ten minutes after the bell had sounded, without having made any alteration in her toilette since eight in the morning, at which hour the same party had assembled to breakfast.

This party consisted of Mademoiselle de Pompière, the marquis, the abbé, and an old officer who had been a kind of tutor in early life to his only son Henri. He was a short-built, well-made, little, wiry man with a curious mixture of cunning and benevolence in his features, while a shrewd

glance which broke from under the heavy penthouse of grey eyebrow, was belied by a good-natured smile which played about his lips. He wore powder, which had been the fashion of that day, but which recent innovations had almost banished; but the Comte de Levet, as he was styled, in order to brave these moderate innovations, and destructive opinions, wore more than the usual quantity, which fell down his shoulders, and thence was scattered on his back, from his queue which hung down to a most unreasonable length. He had on an old violet-coloured velvet coat, which had done him good service, and was decorated with tarnished silver lace, whose very antiquity rendered it of value in his eyes; on the left side was embroidered the only portion of the coat which was constantly renewed, the star of the Saint Esprit; it had been won at Kirch Denkern, where he commanded a squadron under Marshal Broglie, at which engagement he received a wound which compelled him to leave the army.

With the vivacity of his age, and of the age, he had managed during fifteen years of military life, to play away all his fortune, when, by great good luck, he met his old friend, the Marquis de Soligny, who offered him a home ; and to avoid wounding the feelings of the old military beau, the marquis pretended that he engaged him to educate his son in the rudiments of military science. By a fortunate coincidence the count was as highly esteemed by the marchioness as by her husband. It was a sad day for the count, as well as for the whole household, when the marchioness died, but it also rendered him more than ever necessary to the marquis. He had, however, for some time past been travelling, the marquis's liberality having furnished him with the means of doing so.

The only point on which the count was tenacious was his clothes. He clung to the wardrobe in which his conquests had been made at the court of Louis XV. some thirty years since ; the consequence was, that with

all his care, the coats became worse and worse ; while new styles were creeping in, he gloried in the old fashions. The quaint old soldier in his powder, his wide-shouldered velvet coat, his long embroidered waistcoat, tights, and military boots, looked like one of those ancestral pictures, which glance down upon us, and our innovations, from the family frames.

Meanwhile, Henri, the only son of M. de Soligny, paraded Mont d'Or in the latest Parisian fashions. At the commencement of 1789, freedom in dress like freedom in thinking, pervaded all classes, the highest as well as the lowest. For a long time the *vieille noblesse* did not see what events were tending to ; and it was not until tyrant fashion dispensed with powder, cut off shoulder-knots, clipped the wigs, and sacrificed high red heels, and even ladies' voluminous ribbons, that they began to be really alarmed for their order. Henri, who was well aware how strongly his father and

his old tutor felt on all these points, did not venture to adopt the very extremes of the fashions of the day ; but the coat was plainer, the waistcoat shorter, the hair longer, and with much less powder, than suited the standard of nobility in the eighteenth century ; but no one who saw him could deny that the costume, such as it was, was adapted to him.

He was tall, and through the slight quantity of powder, the rich auburn of his hair appeared ; there was an appearance of thought and melancholy about him that detracted from his extreme youth, for the regrets of the young are the parents of age. There was in his whole frame an appearance of will and muscular energy, which contrasted with a somewhat listless manner, but full of vivacity and life, just as the healthiest trees put forth the greenest and freshest leaves. He was well-informed, and had on many subjects a peculiar cast of thinking, one of the distinctive qualities of genius. He had that full lip, which conveys a notion of great flexi-

bility of character in men—in women of great passion—which we find depicted in all the paintings of the illustrious members of the house of Stuart.

It had been indeed strange if a young man, educated from infancy in a feudal château, at a time when feudality expressed real affection and homage for the chief, had not something of authority in his manner, but the last two years in Paris had given him matter for much reflection; and his formerly free, easy, off-hand manner, had changed into much thought and seriousness, if not melancholy anticipations of the future. All these deep views were fostered by the Abbé Louis, who saw much danger in the future; but practised in self-denial himself, he placed a firm, too firm a reliance on the successful issue of the plausible schemes of the day—the regeneration of mankind, the perfectibility of the human race, the happiness of the many—these were his favourite topics. He was a man greatly beloved in his circle,

of widely-extended reputation. At the very time he appears on this scene, it had been proposed to him, and he had found it very difficult to evade compliance, to leave the quiet seclusion of the Mont d'Or for the dignified existence of Superior of the neighbouring Benedictine convent of St. Meilleraie. But his whole happiness was centred in the spot where he resided; the sphere of his duties was precisely that which suited him; and he never imagined that the visionary views which were enunciated at the clubs in Paris, and even at the wretched imitations of Tours, could ever take root and flourish within the vicinity of Mont d'Or.

The marquis himself there is little necessity of describing. His conversation with the abbé will have already proved his adherence to the old system, with all its abuses, anomalies, its creeds, and its refinements. He out-Bourboned the Bourbons in his admiration of a bold exertion of the prerogative; he had read little, and remembered

less. The family had been famous rather for military exploits than for clerkships ; they followed the white plume of Henri of Navarre at Savoy, and bled with Condé at Rocroi. The grim features, the stern and severe countenances of his ancestors, which looked down on the assembled party from the walls, clearly indicated the character of the race from which they sprang ; he never could see the truth of the abbé's reasoning, that all titles of authority are deduced originally from strength, that the name of "king" represented what it was, a tower of strength, and pretensions must ever fail unless they are supported by power. In the feudal times, men were powerful because their labour represented the wealth of the country ; now wealth can, in great measure, be obtained without physical force ; so money is power.

And, therefore, Louis XVI. learned the truth that, in modern days, the power rests with whatever body has the control of the

money-bag ; but if the court of Louis XVI. was not instructed in finance, still less was it imbued with the spirit of François I., when, after the siege of Cambrai, he turned his attention to the amelioration of the social condition of the people, *en se fortifiant de la nation*, to use his own expressive language.

Henri IV., Louis XIV., might venture much, for they had achieved much ; the power which they wielded was not so much in the sword as in their own hearts ; but under the regency of Louis XV. and Louis XVI. it was quite different. Even as dauphin, the latter had made a very unfavourable impression on the people ; he conveyed the idea, of all others the least favourable to a sovereign, of good-nature and weakness ; but for all this, the loyal old marquis cared nothing. If Louis XVI. had declared, like Louis XIV., “ *L'état c'est moi*,” no one was readier than the marquis to echo the sentiment ; no matter what the

sovereign did, it must be right; every action was, like his person, sacred and *Dieu donné*. His was a loyalty which, like that of many a noble Scottish house, had survived the vicissitudes of fortune, and, above all, the tyranny and ingratitude of the court he had served.

And now, to hasten to the last of that circle collected around the table. Ah, it is strange, as we look round any table, to consider the various destinies of those who appear at the moment to be united by the same sympathies—who will precede the rest to the grave, to whom will the great mystery be first unfolded?

Mademoiselle de Pompière was the marquis's sister-in-law. When young, she had, like many other ladies, met with a disappointment in love; indeed, many disappointments; and the last was so severe a shock, that she made a resolution, most fatal to society, to seclude herself in a convent, and, as some people are wont to do

when the world disgusts them, to devote herself more zealously to its service by good works; but it seems that she soon discovered she had mistaken her vocation, and she lost no time in breaking her first vow.

The second, however, withstood all shocks and temptations which were held out to her, and she strenuously resisted all opportunities of marrying. All her qualities were concentrated in one emphatic word, vanity. When those imaginary charms on which she had prided herself no longer existed, even in her deluded brain, she fell back on the vanity of her descent; but she talked far more of the marquis's connections than her own; and well she might, for the Pompières were supposed to owe their origin to a large fabric in Bordeaux, the original name having been written Pompier, which, however useful, conveyed no idea of distinction. This had been at one time converted into Pompière,

and then, shortly after, the De was added to give the full euphony of expression.

Her features still retained some of that beauty which, without doubt, had won the heart of many a cavalier, half a century since, at the court of Louis le Bien-aimé; but age had on her the same effect which it has on fruits—it had made her very bitter; but most of all, her bitterness was aroused against M. de Levet, for reasons which shall appear in the sequel.

She was dressed in the extreme of fashion, such as Tours could furnish at that date: a wig, loaded with towers and minarets of false hair; a pale, straw-coloured dress was intended to relieve, but actually cast a yellow tinge over the complexion; the petticoats were short, in conformity with the fashion of the day, and these revealed, it must be admitted, a very neat ankle, but so slight, that, with the load of hair, it really seemed as though the superstructure was too great for the solidity of the base.

She was scrupulously neat ; frills, ruffles, chemisette, all looked fresh from the hands of the artiste. But there was one thing by which she was known everywhere—it was a paroquet, which never left her ; it perched on her arm, it soliloquized on the pagoda on her head ; it was the guardian angel of her virtue, for it bit any one who ventured to approach her with even the semblance of familiarity. As she swept down the long gallery, with her silks rustling, the paroquet screaming, and the high heels ringing on the floor, it appeared as if she had made her escape from one of the quaintest of the old frames, and had stepped from her resting-place to recal to degenerate descendants the dignity of deportment of its ancient damsels.

What the scales and the sword are to the figure of Justice, the fan and the paroquet were to Mademoiselle de Pompière. Justice never dictated more imperiously and severely with her sword than Mademoiselle

with her fan, and Justice was never more impartial than was the paroquet with the annoyance which it gave to all who came within its dangerous vicinity. If Mademoiselle could only have patched, pomatumed, and painted her mind as she did her person, she might have better concealed its defects ; but, strange to say, people who study their physical deficiencies of exaggerations, and endeavour to remedy them as best they may, will never believe that they can possess any moral defects.

She was bitter against every one because, like all people who think much of themselves, she mistrusted them. Selfishness at all times claims kindred with suspicion. She was the torment of the whole household ; but she had attained that position of boredom that she almost became a necessity, like winter, cold and disagreeable, but a necessary, and at last not wholly a disagreeable infliction ; besides, the noise she made was something like that of a hollow shell,

arising from its very emptiness ; so people became accustomed to her, as they did to the paroquet itself, and at last they might have missed that perpetual clang and clatter.

But if, as we have remarked, she was angry and bitter against any one, it was the count ; and one—not the chief, but one—of the reasons assigned was, that he indulged in a style of wild barrack conversation, interspersed with sundry exclamations singularly repugnant to her courtly education.

“ In the days of His Most Christian Majesty, when the court was dignified by the real gentilhomme, the rôturier lived in the provinces ; now the rôturier goes to court, and the gentilhomme lives in his château,” was her remark. “ Count,” she used to say, whenever he came out with any *piquante historiette*, “ this may be suited to the dames de la halle, but not to the dames de la mode ;” and then the

paroquet, who always knew, as the whole château did, when his mistress was excited, would set up a fearful screeching, and discomfort and dismay were the close of the day.

If the party assembled in the hall represented various phases and classes of society, these were again admirably delineated in the pictures with which the walls were hung. There were

“Ladies beautiful and fair,
Ladies young and débonnair.”

There were great full-lengths by artists who had studied, or at least imitated, the schools of the eminent masters. There were originals of lighter artists, such as Lemoine, Greuze, Watteau, Boucher, each in turn worthy of admiration, like the objects they represented. There were the glorious faces unchanged by time. So is it, the youth and intelligence of the artist is the true youth of the nation. All pales before time except art.

The poet of one age loses by the translation of another. The statesmanship of the one age would be ill fitted to lead its successor. The orator of the Pnyx would be ill understood in the capitol. But the work of the artist, into which he throws not only the representation of the true passion, love and beauty he depicts, but all the inspiration of his own mind, remains in old age—remains to all ages—so long as the canvas and colours endure; and the beauty of the art outlives, as it too often outstrips, the beauty it loves to dwell on.

Thus in this long, solemn, dimly-lighted hall were mixed together relations who had never met, and generations who were only known to each other through the medium of this very art. There were knights of the times of the Crusades, and high-born warriors of a later date, at a time when men did for the love of woman what the patriot does for the love of his country, and the pilgrim for the love of the Mother Church. With

pointed beard, burnished mail, and hand resting on the hilt of his sword, calm as in death, the noble warrior stood. Then there came the long line of ministers and statesmen great in council, and learned churchmen, all of whom had in turn trod and disputed in this hall; disputation, creed, and theory all alike forgotten; and the lives themselves only recorded in musty chronicles, or on that solemn tapestry. And then, not least of all in love, though last in mention, the sweet forms which graced the court of France for many a season, when even love was a serious occupation—a business of life—for it represented great faith, great loyalty, great heart. At that time a court was indeed a *parterre* of beauty. “Car,” said Brantôme, “une cour sans dames est un jardin sans fleurs.”

The room, or rather the gallery, was in the centre of the castle, and lit from the ceiling, wainscoted throughout with rich carved wood, every panel of which contained some distinctive portion of the family arms.

The furniture was of that universal description which our ancestors must, from some notions associated with penance, have preferred: great straight, high-backed chairs bearing escutcheons which severally reminded those who leant back that their forefathers did not admit of lolling and lazy habits. The sofas were drawn up in battle-array against the walls, and bore a forbidding aspect, which anything but invited to repose. Many of these were covered with tapestry some centuries old, which represented the exploits of the preux chevaliers of those times, so that the series of chairs was the Plutarch of the house of De Soligny.

Altogether the aspect of the place was magnificent but solemn; and most young persons would have preferred to it that Paris which Navagero speaks of. “*La citta bellissima, grandissima, ricchissima, abundantissima, populossissima, le cœur de la chrétienté.*” Henri de Soligny felt this, and had latterly passed but little time at La Tour Beauport.

Paris fascinated him with its golden and glittering pleasures ; its wondrous movement and inexhaustible beauty—that Paris in which every street possesses some historical association, and where the population, light as the climate and fickle as the breezes, lives, sports, and dies like beautiful insects in the blue immensity.

CHAPTER IX.

MONSIEUR HENRI.

A LARGE curtain was drawn aside when dinner was announced, and disclosed a dais at one end of the hall, on which the table was placed. To our notions there would have appeared something formal in the arrangement of the plate on the side-buffet, and the old Venetian glass, which was placed in the centre of the dinner-table itself; above all, the plate was not satisfactorily cleaned. So imbued were the grand seigneurs of the last and preceding centuries with the love of antiquity, that they liked their plate to have a time-worn appearance. All the specimens

of old glass were very fine, combining those deep rich colours of which the secret has been entirely lost, and which circumstance renders this glass almost priceless at the present time. There were some drinking-cups of the time of Benvenuto Cellini, those excelling models when men thought it not beneath them to bring grace and elegance into the smallest circumstances of life, and clothed the most prosaic details with a veil of poetry.

The marquis was apparently very fidgety; he looked repeatedly at his watch, and from his watch to the door. If he was particular in any one thing, it was punctuality at dinner.

“Abbé Louis, à table,” said he at last.

“But our dear Henri—our dear Henri!” muttered the count. “Sit down without him!”

“A table!” repeated the marquis in almost an irritated tone.

They all took their places, the paroquet on the back of Mademoiselle’s chair, while

the abbé said grace in a very impressive manner.

Two or three old servants, whose gorgeous and tarnished liveries must have stood the battle and the breeze since the time of the Crusades, placed the dinner silently upon the table. Mademoiselle de Pompière took her seat on the right of the marquis, and Japhet hopped on her shoulder, a position which brought his beak in a direct line with her huge toupet, at which he commenced picking, and discussed the scented powder with great gusto. It took the lady some time to remove from her hands the small gloves in which their beauty had been concealed, and still longer to examine the hands and nails when they had been released.

M. de Levet, who placed himself next to her, tucked a napkin into his neckcloth, which he spread duly over his knees, rubbed his hands, took a glance round the table, and evidently intended to set to work with all the energy of a veteran campaigner.

The abbé seated himself, and remained abstracted and silent. The marquis commenced the process of eating with all the dignity that had been in earlier days, when there was a proper manner and an etiquette even in carrying a spoon to the lips.

“I am proud for the sake of the De Solignys,” Mademoiselle used to say, “that my brother-in-law the marquis has at all times retained the courtly habits of his youth. He preserves,” she continued, with most solemn emphasis, “a proper deportment even in matters of apparently trifling signification, far different to the manner of the *jeunesse* of these irreverent days, or to the camp breeding of the *ci-devant gentilhomme*.” Here she would toss her head, and give a side glance at the count. His only reply would be a twinkle of the eye, a tap on the lid of his box, a pinch of snuff, and a sneeze.

If, as some pretend, it is possible to judge the character by the handwriting, it

is much more certain that you can judge some peculiarities of character far better by the manner in which men eat. One of the great marks of difference between a gentleman and a peasant is the manner in which they eat—the latter dashes like a voracious pike at his food, the former practises that self-control which society requires. Any one on entering that dining-hall might have detected in the quiet, grave, decorous formality with which the marquis handled his spoon, the old nobleman of *la vieille cour*. The exquisite coquetry with which Mademoiselle arranged the ribbons of her *manchettes*, so that they should not incur the slightest risk of a stain, the air with which she dipped the tips of her fingers mincingly in the water, and wiped them daintily on her embroidered handkerchief, could not be achieved by any but by a *vieille fille* of exquisite pretension and elaborate prudence.

The indifference with which the abbé

regarded everything that was placed before him could not be the result of acting; neither could any one mistake M. de Levet, the old soldier, who looked at the dinner as the only great event of the day, and to be met with proportionate zest. He always told his next neighbour at table that he had lost so many dinners while serving with the *grande armée*, that he felt it a duty to make up for the deficiency at this late period of his life. This remark served a double purpose — in the first place, it was an apology and an excuse for his wonderful gastronomic feats, while it gave him an opportunity of filling up the vacant moments with sundry anecdotes of marvellous exploits performed or witnessed in his youth.

The feud between Mademoiselle de Pompière and M. de Levet had originated, like all bitter feuds, in some slight cause, and had expanded with time, while its original cause had been lost sight of. That cause

was Japhet the paroquet. Poor innocent Japhet, the very first day of Mademoiselle's arrival, about a year since, had taken a fancy to the count's head, and fastened its claws into it in such a manner, that he could not be extricated without a great sacrifice of powder and patience. If the old count pretended to forgive, he assuredly never forgot this injury; and when, one unlucky day, Japhet escaped from the blandishments of his gentle mistress, and all the old broken-down retainers of the castle were summoned to rescue him from the topmost branch of the tallest tree which grew at the foot of the battlements, M. de Levet innocently suggested that the best means of getting him down was to frighten him by throwing stones.

“Of course, not to hit him,” said he, with a sly look, which elicited a smile from all the spectators. And so effectually did he give a good example of his own skill, that the first stone he threw certainly had the

effect of bringing Japhet to the ground, but in a most dilapidated condition, that Mademoiselle was dissolved in tears, and in a fury of indignation she rushed to the marquis and implored redress.

The marquis laughed as much as he dared; but as the last of the De Pompières could not obtain justice, like many other people, she resolved on vengeance. For some time, poor De Levet found that he could obtain no attendance. Once, when he was ill, she recommended her maid, who was the very type of her mistress both in appearance and disposition, to attend upon him. He used then to be left for hours without his *lait de poule*; and when it arrived, it was too sweet and other times too salt, that, in either case, he preferred to groan through the night.

Fortunately for Mademoiselle de Pompière and Japhet, the count was ignorant of most of the little malices which were practised upon him; but he had a vague,

uncomfortable feeling of mistrust, and this, when in the presence of Mademoiselle, always showed itself in a peculiar cynicism frequently very ridiculous in its expression and its effects.

“Et ce bon Henri, ce cher Henri !” exclaimed the count. “Sabre de bois, un si bon potage et il ne vient pas.”

So saying, he laid his spoon on his plate with a self-satisfied chuckle. He then drew his chair nearer the table, so as to come to close quarters with the enemy ; but, in so doing, he had the misfortune to commit the greatest outrage to which, at all times and in all climes, a lady can be subject—namely, to place the leg of his chair on Mademoiselle’s dress. She felt the injury ; and it was with a malignant satisfaction she drew her chair quickly away, so as to tear off the lowest flounce.

“Oh, ma foi !” exclaimed the alarmed count, and offering to drop on one knee to kiss the hand which was raised, as

though with the intention of giving him some practical proof of her force of character ; but she lowered her hand before he could seize it.

“ Mon frère ! ” she exclaimed, with a demoniacal expression, “ I perceive that we are no longer at the court of Louis XV. ”

“ Qui se fait brebis, le loup le mange, ” muttered the count. “ Madame, ” said he, touching his star, “ if I did not serve at the court of Louis XV., I did at his camp, with the Marshals de Broglie, de Contades, de Noailles, &c. ”

“ Taisez vous, Comte, ” said the imperious lady. “ Vous m’embêtez avec vos De Noailles ! ”

What the count might have replied to this sally, it is as well not to imagine ; but fortunately, at this point of the dispute, Henri entered the room ; and no sooner did the old count see him, than he left all the marshals to fight their own battles, and rushed forward to anticipate every one in his

welcome to his *protégé*: he embraced him again and again, while the powder, shaken out of his wig in his excitement, fell in a cloud over Henri's shoulders. Then he looked at him from a little distance, as if to take in his whole appearance, seized him by the hand, and rushed into his arms again.

"Ah, here he is—fine fellow, is he not, marquis? Look at him!—plenty of the De Soligny in that figure, and very little of the De Pompière," he muttered aside. And while Henri was welcomed by his father, the count pulled a gold snuff-box from his huge waistcoat pocket, and took a pinch with all the elegance of a professed snuff-taker when to take snuff well was almost a science.

"Well, here you are, Henri, again! How tall you have grown!" said he, walking around to examine him from all sides. "Ah! Henri, here is your old tutor just as he was. You see us all unchanged!" with another side glance at Mademoiselle.

“How goes on the fencing, Henri, and the gymnastics, and the *haute école*? Well, I was master of those sciences. The old tutor was active enough at that time, when the Marshal de Noailles gave me a horse which was a present from his Most Christian Majesty; but he could not ride him himself, so the old tutor tamed him, in view of the whole camp, as Alexander did Bucephalus. Ah,” aside, “he can tame anything but a woman, and do anything but play at whist with a De Pompière!”

Henri's welcome of the garrulous old man was as cordial, though not so expansive. He then went to his aunt, and took her hand, pressing it to his lips, which was the mode of salutation he preferred to saluting her on both cheeks; and then he took his seat at the bottom of the table, the abbé having risen from his place, out of respect to the eldest son of the house.

“And where have you been delayed, my son?” asked the marquis.

The young man coloured slightly, but the loquacity of the count saved him from the necessity of replying.

“When one is young, one is always delayed, *marquis*. He could not travel quickly, laden with all the golden opinions he has won in Paris. Ah, this puts me in mind of the reply of the Grand Monarque to the equally Grand Condé, when he returned wounded from Rocroi. His Majesty went to the top of the *grand escalier* to welcome the hero, who walked with difficulty from the effects of his wounds. ‘Sire,’ said Condé, ‘je demande pardon à votre Majesté de la faire attendre si long temps.’ ‘Mon cousin,’ reprit grandement Louis XIV., ‘quand on est chargé de lauriers comme toi, on ne peut que difficilement marcher.’”

“M. le Comte de Levet,” said Mademoiselle, “this is at least the eighteenth time I have heard you tell that anecdote. Is the court as gay as it generally is, my nephew?”

“I had not much time to see any of the fêtes,” replied Henri; “but from all I can learn, it is not likely that the atmosphere of Versailles is very gay at this moment; indeed, we hear in Paris it is much changed.”

“It is time it should change,” half-muttered the abbé.

The marquis caught the remark, and it was with a raised voice and an animated manner he continued:

“Ah! M. l’Abbé, I hear you. Always the same tone—the rights of the people. I know it—the march of mind, the development of the age. What, in the name of our Lady, do the people require? Every one talks of the rights of the people now, and no one knows what they really mean. What does satisfy, and who can satisfy the people? Is it Maurepas, or Turgot, or Calonne, or Necker—Necker, the once deified Necker, with his compte rendu—or even the good, virtuous Malesherbes?”

“Un peuple taillable et corvéable à merci,”

again whispered the abbé. Fortunately, this time the marquis did not catch what he said, for the old man was waxing warm and angry.

“Abbé!” he exclaimed, and the glasses of the table rattled again as he laid a heavy hand upon it, “Abbé!” how can excellent men of powerful minds like your own, be led away by the jargon of the times? Here is my son, I know, will sometimes defend the *canaille*, who meet together at the clubs to discuss seditious topics, whose only real object is, not the redress of grievances, but to defy the nobles and the Church. Speak of the *gabelle* to the people, Abbé; half of them do not know what it means. Why at one time some people near here rose against pendulum clocks, because they thought they were connected in some way or other with this *gabelle*. At any rate, Henri, let each class endeavour to defend its own rights; it, will have enough to do, you may believe me; and let me, if you advocate these views, remove the tapestry which represents the grave

countenances of the De la Rochefoucaulds, and the Montesquieus, and the De la Trémouilles, and the De Solignys."

"And the De Pompières," added Mademoiselle.

"The De Pompières, if you will, my sister. What I was going to say, these grave countenances must look down with indignation at their degenerate descendants. The *noblesse de l'épée* have been too much mixed up with the *noblesse de la robe*, of late years. Ah! I forgot," said he, as he saw poor Mademoiselle's melancholy face, and then the memory of her sister, one whom he had much loved, flashed across him.

"Ah! well, my dear old friend," said the count, rising, and shaking the marquis by the hand, "no matter where Henri has been, he is with us again, well and happy, and that is all that we can desire."

Henri had all this time been sitting quite silent; he knew his father's temper, and that this irritation would soon pass away; but

still he listened like one who did so rather from respect and courtesy than from any idea that the argument could carry conviction to his mind. This young man, this almost boy, had within the last few months witnessed strange scenes, and he began to doubt whether he was not committing an error in retaining all the extreme views of his father about feudal privileges. He had been in Paris during the early scenes of that movement of the people which was at this time developing itself so rapidly ; he was there shortly before the dismissal of Loménie de Brienne, when the Duke of Orleans was exiled to Villars Cotteret, and Fréteau and Sabathier were condemned to prison, at what time some of the nobles themselves, the Fitzjames, the Praslins, even the De la Rochefoucaulds, on whose proceedings the marquis well remarked the grave features of their forefathers must have frowned, ranged themselves against the court. It was evident to Henri, as it was to the youth of the whole

nation, that a great change was at hand ; and to youth full of life, and love of excitement, the prospect of some change was not disagreeable. What a strange contrast it seemed to this young man, between the bright and busy scenes which he had so lately quitted, and these stern grey old ivy-grown walls, the battlements and keep within whose circle he was residing ; between the grave, solemn features of those great ancestors, whose exploits troubadours had sung, and historians had chronicled ; and the wild enthusiastic countenances with which the streets of Paris were at that time crowded. The past and the future stood forth as it were before him ; to which would he adhere ?

There was something grand in that old man, who clung to his creed, even while events were so rapidly sapping the foundations on which it was based. The *noblesse de l'épée* had this advantage, they had history and experience in their favour, whereas their opponents could only point to theories

and fine-drawn schemes. The history of France had been hitherto the history of a great nation, and the history of this great nation was, in fact, the history of its great houses. "We can show," exclaimed the marquis, "monuments of proud and noble deeds." Well said, marquis! but there never yet was monument that did not suggest decay.

CHAPTER X.

THOU SHALT REMEMBER.

“Thou shalt remember the words I have spoken,
Now thy spirit is dead, and thy vows are all broken,
Broken, ay, broken, and why not confess it ?
A heart that’s once wronged, affection shall press it,
Never again.

“ I loved thee so proudly, I clung to thy side,
Like the bloom to the blossom, the blush to the bride ;
Tell me not, then, that a heart now so saddened,
By love’s sweet affection in time can be gladdened,
Ever again.

“ I will not upbraid, but I will not deceive thee,
My heart may forgive, but my spirit shall grieve thee.
In darkness and solitude, sorrow shall come,
And no angel of love shall enlighten thy home,
Ever again.”

IT was Louise who was murmuring these verses as she sat near the burn that flowed at the end of the small garden of the inn. Florence was in one of the *allées* with the poor lame Marie, whose misfortune had excited little sympathy, for people now become accustomed to it.

On her return from her visit to the Old Homestead on the previous day, Madame Brinville had at once resolved to take the apartments at the inn, until she could make arrangements to purchase, if it could be purchased, the cottage where her youth had been passed. But nothing could have been better calculated to suit her frame of mind, than her present abode; and it was with a feeling little short of happiness, that she made all the preparations for the temporary, as she hoped, occupation of her new home.

On the other side of the stream, and opposite the inn, stood a small chapel, dedicated to St. Catherine, which in her youth

she had often been accustomed to visit. As it was situated in a quiet, secluded spot, and a foot-path led to it, without passing through the village, the door of this chapel was always kept opened; and she remembered how, as a child, from a vague love of mystery and awe, or from that strange predisposition which sometimes disposes the mind to court the very sensations it most dreads, she would resort to that chapel on a dusky evening; and when all her companions were far away, she then felt a wild charm in knowing she was alone with the dead. She would kneel down and place her head against the cold stone, and conjure up strange and fanciful visions; and then, when the gate creaked on its hinges, and the wind whistled through the ivy-grown casement, she experienced a fantastic pleasure it was hard to explain. By the dim light of the one lamp, which was hung above the cross, all things seemed dimly visioned, like the

eternity within her. She was an eccentric child, full of visions, sometimes brighter, sometimes sadder than at others, but always opal-like in their changes. She used to feel rather than to meditate, as she sat at that chapel door, and watched the lines of light on the distant horizon, and then thought how many worlds there existed beyond those which she had seen. There is a vast difference between the two frames of mind, that of feeling and that of meditation. In the former, the ideas suggest themselves to the brain; in the latter, it is an effort for us to people our solitude, or to make a solitude of the busy world around us.

Now the great solace, the one great charm of Madame Brinville's life, was Florence. By a strange perversity of nature, it seems that mothers, whose offspring are associated in their minds with pain, whether physical or mental, love them more passionately than do those privileged ones on whom bright

May suns shine, and bright May days close. Happiness is doubly prized when it is won from a dark and dreary future—it is so much snatched from the mists of uncertainty and death.

How Madame Brinville used to dream of, and to pray for, a happy future for Florence! Surely, she thought, that one so rich in all the gifts of loveliness, that even the wronged mother could forgive the father, for the beauty which the child had inherited, surely such a one could not be sacrificed to a cruel destiny. As she lay awake at night, such thoughts would sweep across her mind, and with her heart full of happy visions of the future she would turn again to sleep.

So strong and ineffaceable are the impressions of childhood, that after Madame Brinville had been two days at Mont d'Or, she felt as if she had never left that neighbourhood. Every spot was associated in her mind with some remembrance, and

every remembrance was fraught with interest. If memory has many sorrows, it has many enjoyments; it prolongs indefinitely those portions of our lives over which we choose to linger.

Little has been said of Marie, whose pale and delicate features seemed to grow paler day by day. For some time before Madame Brinville's arrival, whether it was that her sensitive nature was pained at the observation, or even at the sympathy, which she sometimes excited, from a painful sense that the infirmity had arisen from no accidental, but purely from constitutional causes, she had for some time looked as if she were pining away; but no sooner had Florence arrived, than there was a great change for the better. They at once felt a mutual sympathy for each other; there is one tie which always binds the kind and generous—namely, strength on one side and weakness on the other. But if the advantages of nature were great on

the side of Florence, Marie's mind was much more matured. From a child, unable to take any part in the ordinary amusements of her age, she had turned her attention within herself, and had read much, at least, had read frequently such works as the village library could boast of, and any books of deeper and more permanent interest, which were lent to her by Mademoiselle de Pompière, who was a constant visitor at Madame Blanchard's.

Indeed, to do Mademoiselle justice, her ridiculous pretensions and vanities kept out of view, she was a kind-hearted woman; with her never-neglected Japhet, she would visit all the cottages, while the bird, perched sometimes on the back of a chair, and at others, to the astonishment of the village children, on the mantel-piece, or the top of the bed, would gabble forth his eternal soliloquies. Her regard for the wants and necessities of others was at all times strangely mixed up with the pathetic history

of her own sacrifices, pretensions, sufferings and amiable qualities ; for instance, she would make her carriage, decorated with all the emblazonment of the arms of the Solignys and Pompières, drive to the door of some secluded cottage in which she knew an event most interesting to her at all times was anticipated, or had recently taken place. With a packet of clothes under her arm for the young stranger, she would commence her condolences.

“ Poor woman ! poor woman ! all will soon be well—the natural consequences of marriage. Why do people marry ? Why indeed ! Come here ! come here, Japhet ! ” for the bird was perched on the pillow, and was alarming the poor sick woman. “ Who attends on you, my good woman ? Oh, inattentive ! well, all servants are inattentive ; there is my maid—I treat her like an angel, give her all my old dresses, even those with the latest fashions—but

what does she do this morning? only because Japhet caught her finger in his mouth, she threw a cup of water over the poor bird, and when I told her to leave the room, I heard her say: ‘Oh, mon Dieu! ayez pitié de moi, et jetez des pierres aux autres.’ Oh, how that child cries! but it is not your fault, my good woman—don’t look unhappy—you can’t help it; but it is very silly of children to cry—why should they cry? I was talking about my maid; she had the audacity to say, ‘Adieu, Mademoiselle! for the future, Mademoiselle will please to address me as Madame, for I am going to be married.’ Ah, well! *méchante bête!* I hope that she will suffer every year much worse than you do, my good woman. But, my poor woman, you are ill—you are faint! Here, Charles!”—to one of the footmen—“send for the doctor! tell him that Mademoiselle de Pompière wants him—no, no, not Mademoiselle! there will

be some mistake—tell him that this poor woman wants him, and that I am stopping with her.”

Such was the style in which she would rattle on, to the astonishment and almost to the alarm of her *protégées*; but the truth is, that she meant it all very kindly, and her unpopularity, which was great at the castle, did not extend to the village.

But she was especially kind to the poor lame girl; here, at least, there was no cause for jealousy; moreover, the child was intelligent, and appreciated her kindness, evincing it by warm expressions of gratitude; and where there is no warmth of expression, we may generally believe that there is little feeling, for the common phrase that some people do not show what they feel, is merely the homage which coldness and apathy pays to affection; and so it was, that between two beings so dissimilar a kind of unity of feeling sprang up. Thus the moss clings to the stone, and wild flowers of spring

burst into life through the chinks which time makes in ruins—so these two had a sympathy for each other; and when the girl sat on a bench by the door, and Mademoiselle went into the house to gossip with Madame Blanchard and retail her grievances, which was her great pleasure, she would leave Japhet in charge of Marie, who testified her gratitude for this extraordinary mark of kindness and affection, by the great care which she bestowed on the charge.

Florence had, however, only caught one glimpse of Mademoiselle de Pompière, and that was at an unfortunate moment; the parrot had been left in the carriage, owing to the negligence of the footman, so when Mademoiselle happened to throw her cloak upon the bird, which was nearly stifled, and gave vent to his indignation by the most excruciating wailings, Mademoiselle gave the man one look—menacing as that glance of Vathek's, which desolated provinces—she

rescued her favourite from his uncomfortable position, smoothed his ruffled plumage, but unhappily not her own temper. Florence chanced to be at the window during this scene, and retained, as may well be imagined, by no means a favourable impression of the Pompière disposition. Vainly Marie assured her that she possessed kind qualities ; Florence was one of those who always judge by first impressions, and these impressions in such characters it is very difficult to efface ; so she took an antipathy to Mademoiselle, and invariably went to her own room whenever she heard she was expected.

* * * * *

It was about mid-day, and one of those mid-days which in the climate of Touraine are so warm and genial, that the heart can meditate at will ; for indeed without warmth there can be no charm in thought ; the sky declared the glory of the heavens in one cloudless blaze of sunshine ; so still was the air, that not a leaf trembled on the topmost

branches ; the ripple of the water sounded most cool and pleasant ; a slight haze hung over the distance,

“ That light which half reveals
The shapes that it conceals.”*

Light and love, love and light, twin sisters ever welcome, for when the heart is most full of beauty, it is most susceptible of soft impressions. Madame Brinville had strolled down to the Old Homestead, Florence and Marie were in the garden. Marie was reading one of those books which, like a mother's voice, retain their influence to all time. It was one of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's beautiful creations ; it was a passage in “ Paul and Virginia,” where Virginia is about to part from him.

“ Virginia first went out, and seated herself on the very spot where we are now placed, Paul hastened after her, and seated

* Faber's Poems.

“himself by her side. It was one of those
“delicious nights which are so common in
“the tropics, and the beauty of which no
“pencil can trace. The moon appeared in
“the midst of the firmament curtained in
“clouds, which her beams gradually dispelled.
“Her light insensibly spread itself over the
“mountains of the island, and their peaks
“glistened with a silvered green. . . .
“Virginia’s eyes wandered over the vast and
“gloomy horizon, distinguishable from the bay
“by the red fires in the fishing-boats. She
“perceived, at the entrance of the harbour a
“light and a shadow. These were the watch-
“light and the body of the vessel in which
“she was to embark for Europe, and which,
“ready to set sail, lay at anchor, waiting for
“the wind. Affected at this sight, she turned
“away her head, in order to hide her tears
“from Paul.”

At this moment a voice was heard in the passage, the book fell from Marie’s hand, and her usually pale cheeks were lit up

with a colour, that made her look positively beautiful.

Florence also started when she heard the book fall, and some of the flowers she was idly weaving into a wreath dropped from her lap; but when she looked and saw the colour in Marie's cheeks, she attributed her excitement to her interest in the passage she was reading. Marie immediately took up the book, but the page was lost, and all her attention was given to finding it again, when the voice she had listened to drew nearer.

It was Henri's voice. "Ah!" exclaimed he, "here is my little friend hiding. However, I was determined to find her out, and told Madame Blanchard that I would not go on to the castle, without asking Marie if she remembered her old friend."

He looked at Marie, and then started, for the first time he saw Florence.

It was now her turn to look down at the flowers which were lying around her.

“Mademoiselle Brinville,” whispered Madame Blanchard.

Then there were common-place observations, but these led to some remarks about Paris; and Henri, carried away by his feelings, went on talking, and not without eloquence. The two young girls sat listening to him, with all that attention which is so flattering—more flattering than any commendations, is the silence of an anxious listener. What charm can be greater; but when the listeners are beautiful, like these, is it wonderful that the time should pass rapidly, so rapidly, that he was startled when the clock told him that the castle dinner-hour had arrived?

He rose with apparent regret, and a promise that he would soon return: were the regret and the hope shared in alike by them?

So they parted, and these two young girls remained sitting on the bench, silent and reserved. For some minutes the fictitious woes

of Paul and Virginia were all forgotten. At last, Florence looking into Marie's quiet but now pale countenance, asked her to continue.

And she did so. There was now no difficulty in finding the place, and presently their hearts were wrapped up in the fate of the young lovers, and they seemed to wander together over the dreary sands of the bay of the tomb, which the fate of Virginia has immortalized.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONFESSION.

BUT when the tale was concluded, there was a long pause, Florence seemed to be playing with her flowers, Marie with the book ; and although both of them were silent, each was in her heart aware, that the other was recalling that voice which had broken on their solitude.

“Who is Monsieur Henri?” said Florence when at last the pause seemed painful, because it was so strange.

“He is son of the Marquis de Soligny, who lives at the château,” answered Marie. “He has been some time in Paris to study,

but he has much changed ; he used not to wear a moustache ; and then he has grown taller, and, I think, even handsomer," and Marie spoke all this rapidly, as if she were anxious to avoid the subject, although in truth it was the one on which she most delighted to dwell.

"You never mentioned him," remarked Florence.

"Why no, the fact is that he was absent, and you know, Florence, one does not always mention people, unless something brings their names prominently before one. I do not know how it has happened, that Mademoiselle de Pompière, who is very fond of him, has not mentioned him to me lately ; but even if she had done so, Florence, you would not have been wiser, for you have never seen the old lady."

"Does he often come here?" asked the ever curious Florence.

"I tell you, dear Florence, that he has been absent for some months. Before he

left he used to make occasional visits, but these were so rare, that it was not possible to judge much about him. He is very clever and agreeable, as you see, and much liked in the neighbourhood. Indeed, there is scarcely one person who does not speak good of him," and she was continuing with animated gesture, when suddenly, as though a sudden thought struck her, she turned round and said, "but why do you ask me all this, you must have some reason?"

"Not I, indeed," said Florence, "I only asked a simple and natural question, which you answered by quite a dissertation on Monsieur Henri's qualities, which, I doubt not are very admirable; but I might ask you," continued Florence, "what has brought so bright a light to those eyes, and such a glow to those cheeks?"

"No, no! do not ask me any questions," and Marie hid her face in her hands, "I cannot answer them."

The poor girl should have raised it

proudly, for never had any one more richly endowed with the qualities of beauty looked for that moment more lovely. If her heart was his, as Florence began to suspect, what a generous passion must that be which could assume such a livery, when the current of the blood, even at the faintest whisper of a name mantled in her cheek ; sweet thought is it, that there is no one so lonely to whom, in one or in another shape, Love does not some time speak.

“No one so lost or desolate,
But some heart, tho’ unknown,
Doth pine to meet its own.”*

Sitting there a cripple with crutches by her side, poor Marie’s heart could contain a whole volume of sensation. “Florence,” said she after a short pause, “you read the language of the heart, do you know that of flowers? Of all flowers, the most beautiful is the rose. Here is an old book which contains a chapter on roses.”

* Longfellow.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHAPTER ON ROSES.

BEAUTIFUL Provence, to thee we owe the lay of Troubadour, the wild tale of romance ; there by the blue waters of the joyous Mediterranean the orange-flower disputes with the pomegranate and myrtle each spot of soil, and the blue tints of the sky and the light outlines of the hills blend together ; while on distant ridges the palm recalls the glories of the East, and the lofty pine stands forth on high as the guardian of the forest—who that has ever dwelt in Provence, but must look back to that period of life with fond regret ; for in such a climate even sensations of sorrow are

subdued by the softness of the air. “ C’est le lieu du monde où on peut mieux se passer de bonheur ;” but it is not for her minstrelsy, though lips worthy of the theme have sung the loves of Provence ; it is not for her wild tale of romance, though these cling to every ruin like the ivy of centuries ; it is not the orange-blossom, though at the name the fair bosom gently heaves and the damask glows in the cheek. Not so much for all these do we love fair Provence, as for the rose which her soil gives birth to ; it is of La Provence, above all, that England is redolent, and her roses are not the least of the graces which England owes to France.

Gently, gently touch the flower, delicately as you would those charms whose beauties the rose of Provence, by various names, commemorates. Let the Biron recal the soft hues and gently-loving countenance of her whose beauty, at one time, added the greatest charm to the majesty of a court ; or shall we speak of the De Noè,

bright as the race which was so vain and arrogant, and boasted a blood purple as the blood of kings? or of the D'Aguessau, which seems almost to blush when gazed at, and whose leaves droop modestly at the lightest touch, emblem, in all things, of woman's purity? or most seeming, as most lovely of all, where is La Reine, ever fragrant and ever blooming, the same in bleak November as in bright May? Like that proud sovereign, whose name she bears, whom adversity could not tire, and whose graceful and winning charms Time could not detract from.

Place me at Fontenay-aux-Roses, and there let me slumber away the day on some sunny bank. If there be a language in flowers, surely this must be the language of poetry—if there be a flower more celebrated than another in verse, surely it is the rose. I pick from the bank on which I lie one flower more beautiful than the rest, and then I think of her whom such flower

once adorned, even as the roses now bloom upon her tomb.

“Allorchè nel cielo
Di raggi lucente,
Il sole apparì
Sul verde suo stelo.
Vezzosa ridente
La Rosa fiorì
Ma cadde appena il dì
Che languida, smarrita
Fede la sua beltà ch’ è la sua vita.”

The queen of all flowers, as she is called by the Tuscan poet—

“Amongst all flowers the rose is queen,
Because in her is brightest seen,
How beautiful and transient all we love has been.”

Dear to the Church, “because,” says Carlo Cartari, “the rose bestows grace, and faith, and strength.” The Scripture speaks of its “faithful and sweet-smelling savour.” Saint Chrysostom, writing of the Apostle, says : “Qualem Rosam Christo

mittit Roma. The rose," he continues, "possesses the faculty of strengthening the weak. The rose is a faithful image," says he, "of Christ, because, in all her beauty, she is surrounded by thorns; so Christ was also crowned with thorns, and wore them in His glory." Finally, we are told that our good works bloom hereafter like roses, while our present sufferings are represented by thorns.

History also tells us that the rose was cultivated at Rome, as the flower possessing the most admirable of all qualities. It is truly not unmete that amid the ruins of the Cæsars' palace, the rose should grow in wanton luxuriance; for in Rome's palmy and imperial days, and long after, in the days even of the Colonnas, when they possessed captains worthy of the name, the columns of Rome's greatness; on festal days, the Patricians crowned their brows with roses, and wore them at their feasts; they were suspended in festoons on the arches under

which they triumphed, and were planted and ever renewed around the tombs of those they loved—

“*Manibus est imis rosa grata et grata sepulchris.*”

The rose was, in all times the badge of conquest. The House of Lennox boasts, “*Dans la rose je fleuris;*” there was the rose of time-honoured Lancaster, and the rose of the great Plantagenet. Venice, too, the city of the sea, possessed her rose, which sprang forth, like her own fair palaces, by the stroke of the enchanter’s wand; for we read that, in the days of Pius V., after a great battle gained by the Venetians over the Turks, suddenly, in the gloom of night, a rose of fire was seen on the cross of St. Mark, while the Rialto and the Piazza St. Marco were, in a moment, covered with flowers of peculiar fragrance.

Shall we pass on to the far Indies; shall we speak of the roses of the famed Cashmere,

and of those fickle ones who, even in their beauty, love to change, for these, too, find their emblems in the rose? The roses planted on the banks of the sweet waters of Asia bear in them the impress of all instability—pale in the morning, deep red at mid-day, and purple in the evening. Of these Padre Bompiani was thinking when he wrote:

“The sun’s flower is the rose,
She buds forth with the light,
At noon she deeper hues disclose,
And purple grows at night.
Her leaves fall with the falling day,
And perish with each dying ray.”

“Give me that rose which has been worn next your heart.” How often has such favour been asked and answered; and who has not loved and cherished the flower so given even when its leaves were dead and the flower had faded! Ay, and it were well so to do; for its fragrance represents good and generous works and sweet and holy thoughts,

while the sufferings which those hearts that are the most richly endowed are ever doomed, sooner or later, to bear, are the thorns which survive the blossom.

And beautiful above all roses are those which Love calls forth on the cheeks of Virtue and Purity, emblems of gentle feelings. Rememberest thou that day, that festal day, when we placed roses on the altar, and the porches were strewn with rushes? Most happy are they who have the power to sow such seed of love, and to see such beautiful produce — happy as the favoured lover in Arabian verse, who, meeting a maiden, thus accosted her :

“Maiden, my looks have called the roses to thy cheeks ; let me cull what I have sown, for the law permitteth every man to take his own.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VISIT.

THE next morning, in the same spot, in the same frame of mind, the two young friends sat together, and talked over the visit of the previous day.

“Ah, Marie!” said Florence, “you have been very quiet here all your life; but the life may be very still and the heart very busy. The hum of insects and the murmur of bees dies away each evening, but the heart beats on. I have often thought that the world is not without—it is within us!”

“I know what you mean to say, Florence,”

replied Marie, "but I can assure you that you are mistaken." The voice, however, belied the assurance.

Just then Madame Brinville appeared. She was too full of the past much to heed what was passing around her at the present. She had not noticed Henri's long visit; and even though she had, it would have awakened but little curiosity. She was fast arriving at that state of indifference in which we behold a series of events passing around us, without any anxiety to direct or to be interested in them. All that she asked for was peace—peace of heart.

It was certainly not possible for a mother to be blind to the extreme beauty of Florence; and the contrast between her and Marie only made this beauty more apparent. This almost pained her, for she thought that Marie must be conscious of the difference between them; but it was not so. Marie thought but little about the matter until later, when circumstances called her attention to it.

Madame Brinville asked Florence to accompany her in a walk. They passed through the small garden-gate. Almost mechanically, she took the path which led to the old house. It was a lane full of blossoms—blue forget-me-nots and fragrant roses grew on the banks, but they were passed unnoticed by Madame Brinville, though Florence, and Marie who had joined them, stopped every moment to gather some. Life has commenced in sad earnest, when we do not stop to gather flowers as they grow in our path. As for Florence, she possessed the lightness of heart of one who knew no guile—a gay and happy child she moved along—while Marie was like one subdued by secret cares.

Madame Brinville arrived at the house long before her companions. She went, as she was accustomed to do, to that room up-stairs, which she still called her own in conversing with the old gardener. It was furnished just as she had left it, and the same roses were growing in at the windows, of which

the lattices were almost always open in that climate. Over the mantel-piece was a piece of work which, as a child, she had given to her mother. It represented the squarest of houses with the straightest of gates, the greenest and most perpendicular trees, all in floss silk, on the top branches of which some curious-looking birds in red plumage, or rather in red worsted, were perched. There was the date underneath, and the inscription, "Louise à sa chère mère, Mai, 1765," just three-and-twenty years since, when, as a young girl, she lived and loved in her mother alone.

Florence followed her mother up the stairs. It was the first time she had been in that room. Her attention was immediately attracted by the piece of work, and the similarity with her mother's name struck her fancy.

"Here, mamma, here is your name," said Florence.

Madame Brinville had been prepared for

the time when she should be compelled by circumstances to relate to her child some of the events of her early life, which she could touch upon with least pain. Like the oak on Mount Algidos, which gains strength from each succeeding stroke, she had disciplined her heart within the last ten days to this, and it was with less pain than she would otherwise have felt, that she turned to Florence, and told her it was her own work.

“Yours, mamma ; and how did it come here ?” asked Florence.

“This was my home, Florence, when I was very young ; indeed, for some time afterwards. There is not a spot in the garden, not a flower that blooms, which is not associated with some memory of my childhood. You are so young, Florence, that you do not know the value of such memories and associations. You live in the Future, Florence, I live in the Past.”

“And the Present,” said Florence.

“No, not in the Present, there is scarcely any Present, for, while we are expressing our enjoyment of it, it has even then passed from us. You will some day learn that the heart, unless it is asleep or at rest, possesses too much of the Infinite within it, to be satisfied with the Present.”

“Mamma, I am very happy here, I enjoy the sunshine, the flowers. I like to sit in the garden of the little inn and meditate.”

“And meditate, Florence ! then will you allow me to ask you how long your thoughts are fixed on the Present ? Are they not always flying back to times and scenes which you people with strange fancies, old châteaux in which you lodge, for instance, all the wild creations of a most wild little brain ? or do you never ponder on the future, on the——”

Madame Brinville here checked herself, for she saw a light flush gradually over-

spreading Florence's cheek ; it was evident that she had dreamt of the young girl's future.

"But, mamma," she said, after a long pause, "tell me all about this spot. How I wish I had some place to return to, and remember everything that passed when I was a child. My first recollection is of a large house with a great many trees before it, somewhere near Paris. Why did we leave it, mamma?"

"I was here when only five years old," replied Madame Brinville, evading the latter part of the question, "and I will tell you all about this spot, Florence, so that you may take an interest in it which will add to my own. You now know the garden, its gentle glades, and that river walk as well as I do. Stay for one moment, let me see whether I cannot reanimate it for you, with all the happinesses, its tendernesses, and endearments, which it possesses for me : the associations of place are the strongest

of any, if it be only a place where we have once loved and been loved. To me, the trunk of that tree now overgrown with moss, recalls the moments I passed, anxiously anticipating that Future which was mine only too soon. In after life we all seek some Zoar, some little city to flee to, and I shall hope to find a Zoar here. You never saw your grandmother, Florence, but she was very like you, her youth waved like your own, and even in age her eyes never lost their contented and happy expression; happy in her life, in her heart, in her circumstances, she had only one regret; that the sphere of her excellence was limited—there was not a cottage in the village which she did not visit constantly, hers were angels' visits, Florence, in all things save their rarity. She—"

At that moment, Madame Brinville was interrupted by the sound of horses' hoofs. Close to the cottage, there was a sharp turn in the road, and suddenly a carriage with outriders was seen rapidly approaching. A lady

was standing up in the carriage, and calling loudly to one of the outriders, whilst he pointed with his whip to the house where they were. Madame Brinville shrank involuntarily from observation, while Florence, her curiosity conquering her natural reserve, concealing herself as well as she could, looked out eagerly to see who it could be.

“ Oh, it is the carriage from the château, mamma,” she exclaimed when she had a fair view of the old, quaint, lumbering, heavy, machine, in which it pleased Mademoiselle de Pompière to pay her visits of ceremony, or occasionally for the honour of the family, to make a solemn progress through the country.

The horses were fine, black, powerful animals of the Norman breed, the manes fastened up with ribbons, which had at one time been bright red, but of which time had extracted much of the colour, their tails were decorated in a similar manner, and the harness ornamented with scrolls and emblazonments, represented the more egre-

gious portions of the owner's vanity. The carriage itself was a kind of triumphal car, for even in 1788, when it was re-decorated, the art of coach-building was not carried to any perfection, and this had been constructed half a century previously, by a M. Chabannes of Tours, at a time when the dignity of a family was supposed to be associated with every possible inconvenience. At the period when this carriage was built, the equipages of an aristocracy were not duly esteemed, unless they were decorated in the most lavish manner, and so their carriages rolled along like the car of Jugurnauth, and also like the car of Jugurnauth in this, that they crushed the people in their progress.

The dresses of the outriders and the servants were of a similar character, their coats were decorated with lace, which had once represented gold, but the gold had been rubbed off in so many places, that the silver peeped through. They wore boots which reached to the thighs, with enormous spurs, three-

cornered hats, each decorated with a feather, completed their extraordinary equipment ; but the *tout ensemble* produced a still more absurd effect, because the clothes of the outriders, and the coachman on the box, had been made many years since for servants who had been drafted from the old corps of the Mousquetaires de la Garde ; and all these, as they died off—for even mousquetaires will die — had been replaced by small men, who seemed, as the pageant passed along, to have the greatest difficulty in keeping in their clothes. However, if the intention was to produce a certain awe in the village, it had the desired effect. The children screamed with delight, the old men and women ran to the door, and shaded their eyes with their hands to avoid being dazzled with its brilliancy, the dogs even paid their tribute to the general enthusiasm. Mademoiselle de Pompière, when she prepared for similar excursions, used to recal with pleasure the progresses of Louis XV. in the

forest of Fontainebleau, and endeavoured to imitate the bow and the grace with which the Queen used to kiss her hand from the window.

Whips cracking, body creaking, parrot croaking, up drove the carriage. Marie was sitting in the garden, and so much taken by surprize, that she had not time to seize her crutches and retreat into the house before Mademoiselle de Pompière had espied her.

“Here, here! little one,” she cried out, “where are you running to, after I came here to see you? What are you frightened at? the carriage won’t hurt you, ma petite. I drove to the inn, but your mother told me that you were here. Ah! she is more attentive to you than any one is to me. And now I wish to alight. Well, where are they—Jacques, Clément, Adolphe? (she liked servants with euphonious names). Here, you lazy fellows, come and let down these steps. There, gently, gently! I want

M. Henri. Where is he—where is M. Henri?”

But, while this soliloquy was going on, Henri had slipped out of the carriage at the other door, and was waiting with all due respect to receive his aunt when she alighted.

“Ah! this is as it should be, un preux chevalier, in spite of the clubs and those horrible places they tell me you frequent in Paris. And here is Marie coming to meet me. Why, how you tremble, girl!”

The truth is, that Marie would not have appeared at the door at all had she seen Henri, and when he suddenly appeared at the carriage door, she felt a sudden faintness; but this was quite lost on him; he held out his hand frankly and cordially to her (why is it that love is always full of deceit and seldom cordial in public?), and there was something of disappointment in his manner when he asked Marie, if she came to that place for solitude.

“ Oh, no !” said Marie. “ Madame Brinville and Mademoiselle Florence are here.”

“ Madame ' Brinville and Florence !” he muttered. “ So, Marie, that was Mademoiselle Florence whom I had the pleasure of seeing the other day ?” asked Henri. “ And where are these ladies ?”

“ Yes, ma petite, where are they ?” asked Mademoiselle de Pompière. “ Why, I drove down here in the hope of making Madame Brinville's acquaintance—or, rather, I may say, that Henri made me drive here, for I am very idle about visiting, or I should have called before. Now, my nephew, give me your arm, and we will endeavour to find them.”

Henri's face brightened at the suggestion. The whole morning he had employed in inducing his aunt to drive to the village ; he wished to have some excuse to see Florence again, and could imagine nothing better than that his aunt should go down to pay a visit of ceremony to Madame Brinville. All this was sadly against her inclinations,

but she could never resist Henri's importunities ; so the state carriage was ordered, and put in motion as we have described.

That Marie ever cared for him, never crossed his imagination, nor, even if it had, would the circumstance have deeply affected him, for we invariably prize the affections of others precisely as our own hearts are in harmony with theirs. He liked Marie very much, as all kind natures must have liked her ; but this was far from love, which poor Marie, whose heart was filled with one idea, did not perceive ; and so she went on cherishing this affection, almost without being aware of it.

As for Madame Brinville, she trembled when she heard the foot of Marie on the stair, coming, as she well knew, to invite her down ; but Florence, it must be admitted, felt a gleam of pleasure flit across her mind. She recalled the looks of Henri on the preceding day ; she did not forget how his attention had been fixed on her ; it was, therefore,

with great alacrity that she obeyed her mother's desire to proceed to the garden and meet the party.

She was met at the foot of the stairs by Mademoiselle de Pompière herself, leaning on Henri's arm. The paroquet had, on this occasion, perched on her shoulder, whence it looked around in the most supercilious manner. She stared at Florence through her glass, and she could hear the half-whispered words :

“ Yes ! she is pretty, very pretty.”

And then she asked Florence how long her mother proposed to remain at Mont d'Or.

Before Florence had time to answer the question, Madame Brinville appeared. There was a quiet dignity in her manner, a self-restraint, a self-possession which is never more apparent than in those who have passed through many and sad experiences. Mademoiselle felt that, on this occasion, all her graces and affectations would be thrown

away ; she did not even venture to repeat the question she had put to Florence. On the contrary, it was with something like an apologetic tone that she explained how she had followed Marie, her mother having told her where she was, in order to invite her to be present at a fête, which was to be given at the château in two or three days. Some actors were passing through the village, and a temporary theatre was to be erected for them in the château. It was, she explained, the marquis's birthday.

Mademoiselle de Pompière was not wanting in good-nature ; she saw Henri's undisguised admiration of Florence, and so she turned to Madame Brinville, and invited her to be present at the performance with her daughter.

Madame Brinville was on the point of declining, for her object in coming to Mont d'Or, to seek quiet and seclusion, was quite at variance with the acceptance of such an invitation : but when she saw Florence's eager

look, she then thought it would be hard and selfish to shut her out of all the amusements which the young love so much, so that it was with a graceful courtesy she accepted.

Mademoiselle was gracious, and satisfied ; she stroked the paroquet as she stalked majestically down the gravel path ; she was pleased because her nephew was so evidently gratified ; besides, Florence was so graceful and beautiful ; she felt that she would add an additional charm to the evening's amusement, and Madame Brinville's manner recalled the refinement of a society to which, in *La Vie de Province*, she had been long unaccustomed ; so, on the whole, the party separated mutually satisfied.

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN.

THERE were great preparations in progress at the castle, and M. de Levet was in his glory. The old hall, rich in paintings and in heraldic decorations, was to be converted into a theatre. The village artists were employed to paint views, which they adorned with tints far brighter, although more opaque, than any which ever graced even an African sky. Green boughs and green baize were two invaluable adjuncts. There were flower-gardens with real flowers; rolls of tin-foil were prepared to represent thunder; and the lightning was to flash from oil lamps

carried before lines of white calico. One scene represented a magnificent saloon, on which the artist had exhausted all his imagination ; candelabras, glasses, sofas, chairs, ormolu, vases, were all huddled together in wonderful confusion ; there was an apothecary's shop that would have broken the heart of any modern homœopathist ; another scene represented an antiquary's abode, in which the most extraordinary mammoth and fossil remains were placed on shelves, one long crocodile filled up the whole length of the scene, while below were mummies, cases of preserved insects, skeletons, broken armour, and old relics, which excited the envy and admiration of the competing artists. There was throughout the castle the usual stir and bustle consequent on such an event ; then followed the ordinary amount of dispute, suggestion, animadversion, criticism, which would seem to be inseparable from all private theatricals.

M. de Levét was everywhere ; at one

moment he might be seen on the top of a ladder, accompanying his labours with sundry reminiscences of the manner, in which temporary theatres were erected in the camp, when Louis XV. visited it at Mayence. Mademoiselle de Pompière was most interested in the heraldic decorations, the splendour of the Soligny arms ; but she manifested the greatest anxiety that those of the De Pompière, which at one time it had sadly puzzled the heralds to discover, should take their due place on the 'scutcheon of pretence. Then, on the stage, were the actors reciting their parts ; and the actors themselves being of the most inferior description, they thought it essential to use more than ordinary energy in their delivery of them. Mademoiselle constituted herself at once the critic and the audience on the occasion of these rehearsals.

“ Mademoiselle Julie,” she would exclaim, “ how is this ? you turn your back on the audience. This, let me tell you, is the manner in which the verses should be recited. M.

de Pompière, my grandfather, was reader at the court of His Most Christian Majesty ; so much was he esteemed, that Molière dedicated one of his plays to him. I forget the lines, but I know that Pompière rhymed with *terre*.”

“ Mais comment donc,” cried M. de Levet from the top of one of the scenes, where he was fastening up some drapery. “ I know the lines ; they ran :

“ Je connais un paysan qu’on appelait gros Pierre,
Qui n’ayant pour tout bien qu’un seul arpent de terre,
Prit le nom pompeux de Monsieur de Pompière.”

“ M. de Levet !” cried the indignant lady, “ vous êtes un ignorant, un impertinent ! You may well say that you have lived in camps. My brother shall hear of your impertinence ;” and so saying, the indignant lady stalked out of the room.

As soon as she had left, the arrangements progressed not only more expeditiously, but also more satisfactorily. Mademoiselle Julie

recited her part far better, when she had not so severe a critic staring her in the face, M. Bonjeau made a far happier lover, when he was not subject to the cross artillery of her cross eyes, M. Arnolphe a bolder baron, when he had not to contend against such an adamantine character as Mademoiselle's. In fact, when this oracle of courts and universal censurer of morals and manners had departed, we must admit the fact that things went on far better. A great weight seemed to be lifted from the minds of each of the performers; so true is it that, in general, those who undertake to manage everything, end by disarranging everything.

But if this was an eventful day at the château, it may well be conceived that it was no less important at Mont d'Or. Although she had so long inhabited Paris, Florence had never been once at a theatre. Besides, even for those who are accustomed to the stage, private theatricals possess a charm peculiar to themselves. Can we not

all of us recal in our youth with what interest we have stood with awe before the green curtain, when we endeavoured to picture all the glorious mysteries concealed behind it? And then how charming the plays themselves were! how extravagant the romance! how direful were the consequences of revenge or jealousy! What imagination could picture brigands more picturesque, knights more valiant, and ladies more devoted, than those who walked the stage of the strolling theatre, which was pitched in the market-place at the season of the fair. Surely, we thought, to produce such great works, to call forth such passions, to arouse an audience to such a pitch of enthusiasm, as those children displayed who were stationed in the gallery, from the moment the doors opened; surely this must be the production of a mine of intellectual wealth. And then — oh! sad and ever-to-be-regretted moment—when we one day were informed the whole thing was a delusion; that the

roses were made of tin, the green sward of green baize, that the trees were painted with the commonest green colours, that the waterfall consisted of white zinc which rolled round and round, and the secluded seat, where the whisper of love was first heard—that moss-grown trunk of a venerable tree—was nothing but a broken box put together in the rudest manner, and tested by the roughest of carpenters, in order to see whether it was capable on the stage of bearing the weight of young affection.

The love of the stage in France can survive all illusions, because the French attach more importance to the dialogue and the smartness of the wit, than they do in other countries. And the Greeks never used to tire of the theatre, because they had no *coulisse* to disenchant them. Situated on the gentle slope of some green hill, while expanding far below the spectators were olive groves, rippling little silver streams, blending with the deep blue of a Greek sky; in a climate where there was nothing but a

thin and rarely-drawn *velarium* to conceal the audience from the glories, and the sometime, but most rare, storms of the heavens, the Greek stage united in perfection, all the advantages that nature and art could bestow upon it. The Greek poet rose, therefore, to higher inspiration than the objects of everyday life—and even these were of the noblest and most exalted character; while the passions and sympathies of the audience became associated with the ideal presented to them. All the elements were at the command of the Greek poet; his appeal was at once directed to the senses; his imagination expanded widely as the amphitheatre of purple hills by which he was surrounded; the blue immensity of the sky, the distant, crystal, tideless sea, the beautiful olive groves, the wide plains, all were his. And then there were above, below, and around him, works of art beyond compare, which had bid defiance to time and man's ravages. These temples, these monuments, were not mere objects of curiosity, or

idle admiration, they were each of them a centre round which people clustered, and they learnt to associate them with all the objects of their daily lives. So when the dramatist stood before his audience, nature lent him her gorgeous scenery, the whole earth became his stage, and the hearts of the audience were the instruments from which his melody was struck.

Alas ! how different to the modern theatre ! To what can an actor now appeal within the four walls to which all his inspiration is confined. Now truly he must be an actor, for he must represent emotions he cannot experience, and the imagination of the audience must supply the defects of his machinery and his skill.

Florence had just arrived at that age at which all the impressions are most vivid, and the mind naturally shapes all the interests and objects of life into a drama in which self must ever occupy a prominent place. Often she and Marie used to amuse themselves

in inventing tales ; at one time the scene would be laid at the time of the Crusades : a lone damsel in a solitary watch-tower persecuted by an importunate suitor, until some gay young knight came to her release—very simple, indeed, the plot and always ending happily. We invent in a different spirit later in life, and all our dramas do not end quite so well. Or she would imagine fairies—good, kind, beneficent fairies—in whom grace of form expressed all the graces of their minds—mild and gentle, always performing good works of love and charity, radiant with hopes, with sparkling eyes and azure wings ; in fact, every day had its dream, its hope ; and now to-day, all these dreams were to be realized : the world of the stage, the world of emotion, was to be laid open to her young heart, and a new life revealed to her.

Neither let it be supposed for one moment that the toilette on this occasion did not occupy much of her attention. She

was not at all above or beyond those female vanities which are the portion, and not the least graceful portion, of woman's inheritance. Madame Blanchard had been taken into consultation by Madame Brinville, and admirably was the toilette arranged. That it should be simple—as simple as her own character—was settled from the first; but true simplicity, combined with grace, is no less difficult to attain in dress than it is in disposition.

No one could accuse Florence of vanity, but on this occasion when dressed she stood long before the glass, and then returned again to see that the picture it presented to her was one agreeable to gaze on; it would be doing her much injustice to suppose that she was otherwise than satisfied, and we should not like her so much, if this satisfaction did not convey to her most pleasurable emotions.

Poor Marie also had been discussed, and her dress arranged for her. Nor was it ill-selected: a plain, pale silk harmonized with

the expression of her countenance; her hair, braided and gathered into a knot, was ornamented with one single flower, and from this knot a long and graceful curl hung down to the shoulder. Above all she was scrupulously neat; and so becoming was the costume, that when she appeared, Madame Brinville marvelled at the effect produced by excitement and dress. It was hard to believe that it was the same little figure that used to sit at the door of a morning in a russet gown, quietly knitting.

The hour when they were to start at length arrived, and the whole village was alive on the occasion, for it was the custom on the marquis's birthday to have one of those fêtes which, in the country, are at all times so agreeable, and which afford all parties the opportunity of expressing their mutual feelings, the kind wishes expressed by one, the hospitality and hearty welcome given by the other. Every horse in the neighbourhood was engaged for the occasion, and

caparisoned with such trappings as the inhabitants themselves possessed or put into requisition from the surrounding hamlets; the women were decked out in the gaudiest petticoats, and the bodices, tightly laced, showed off forms which justified the reputation Touraine has long enjoyed for female beauty; the men wore their best vests, and any deficiency of ornament was concealed by enormous bouquets; hats with plumes, sashes, and tassels represented the riches or the vanity of the owner. Then there were two carts full of fine, healthy village children, all for this occasion *vouées au blanc*, with white strings of beads in their golden hair.

The procession was led by a band, which was honoured for the occasion with the loan of the heaviest, tallest, and most raw-boned horses. Object in the fête there was none, except that of honouring the marquis, and enjoying a good dinner, which was prepared in a tent before the castle. The rear of the procession was brought up by the curé in

his high, broad-wheeled gig, all the iron-work of which had long since given way, while every spring, as it was worn out, was replaced by a coil of rope. The curé himself, a kind and venerable man, blessed the little children before he started, who all reverently crossed themselves; then each of them gave him a flower, which he kindly accepted, and loved for their sakes. And is it not well that the Church should bless us in our joy, as she consoles us in our sorrows; that the Church, like the sun, should shine alike on the opening flower as on the dead and withered leaves; that she should be present at the feast-day as well as at the fast, sympathize with the merry heart as well as with the gloom of despair, and greet us with a welcome, or bid us farewell, always with the accents of love?

Up the hill the procession wound, preceded a short distance by the party from the hotel. On their arrival, Madame Brinville was driven into the wide, grass-grown court,

which opened into a large hall, where the pictures of knights, and statesmen, and gentle ladies, realized to Florence the bright days of Paladins and Troubadours; but she had not much time to recal the past; it was real-life in which she had to play a part, and she felt it was so when they were ushered through the hall to the terrace, where a large party was assembled to see the procession.

The report of Madame Brinville's arrival at Mont d'Or had excited some little interest in the neighbourhood, and Florence's beauty had given rise to more, so that they were at once the centre of attraction. As for Florence, she advanced with downward glance, heeding neither the look of admiration of the men, nor the half-jealous expression of the ladies—for women are women all the world over, whether at Paris or in the Touraine.

The guests were collected from all parts of the country; there was the great man,

Monsieur le Procureur du Roi, et Madame son épouse, Monsieur le Régisseur du Département, there were Madame la Comtesse, and Madame la Baronesse, with titles as old and faces as wrinkled as their parchments. It is sad it should be so, but the fact is undeniable, that the same passions, rivalries, jealousies, pervade the humblest valley as the great city; it was at once felt and admitted that Florence was very beautiful, and, consequently, later in the evening, some of the most jealous of the ladies—those who were verging on the fatal age—pretended to think that a little neat, plain, unpretending, blue-eyed girl, for the first time now brought into notice, was more beautiful than Florence. The last resource of jealousy is to praise inferiority.

Up the approach through the noble avenue of chesnuts the procession advanced; the band struck up a joyous air, the horsemen waved their wooden swords, adorned with ribbons, and shouted for the sole plea-

sure of making a noise. In front of the château, and before the tent where the dinner was laid out, stood a tree ornamented with presents, after the manner of the good old Christmas-trees, for which old and young were alike to scramble later in the day. Then two young girls were to be betrothed, who each received a purse of money, presented by the fair hands of Mademoiselle de Pompière herself; she then added a box, which the marquis assured her contained some trifling toys, but when it was opened, she discovered, to her great indignation, it was a collection of baby-linen, which brought the flush of anger to her cheeks, and that of love to the betrothed. After all this, the marquis stepped forth, and made a kind, simple speech, such as touch because they flow from the heart. It was received with loud applause, and the procession passed on.

But a short time after these joyous scenes—how short a time after!—when darkness

had settled on the land, how the old and the young loved to recal them. Happy the people whose annals are vacant ! and none were more so than the annals of the village of Mont d'Or. Here was peace and content ; but, alas ! there dwelt too near those beings who prowl around the glories, the triumphs, the happiness of a nation. In Paris, even now, bold and reckless words had been spoken, and bold and reckless deeds accomplished ; but, until lately, these had found no responsive echo in the Touraine. Who could truly have imagined it, save those who take the trouble to reflect, and who therefore too well know that, as the consequences of our actions never die, so the consequences of political acts never lose their signification ; that these opinions would so soon have embraced the whole of France, and that old ties and old associations would have proved ineffectual to restrain the wild spirit of modern innovation.

During the whole of the proceedings which have been shortly described, Florence's at-

tention had been riveted on one object—the procession itself. It was not so much that it positively interested her, but she had assumed the attitude of intense attention in the hope of not appearing to attract it, and yet, without looking round, she felt that she was more observed than her position authorized. Madame Brinville observed it also, but without surprize, perhaps with some slight feeling of satisfaction and gratified vanity.

Moralize as we may, the love of admiration is in all hearts one of the strongest passions—whether it be admiration for beauty or for genius—the homage paid is always most grateful; it is the source of much that is true and noble, but, alas! also of much that is low and despicable in the course of human life; but let us bless the good wherever we find it, without discussing the principle whence it springs. Let us, when thirsty, seek the refreshing waters, and not heed the source from which they flow.

The procession, fairly out of sight, then commenced that buzz of gossip, charming from its very lightness, which is at once the aim and the accomplishment of all general society. Some of the party remained on the terrace to admire the blaze of twilight which hung over the masses of dark wood ; a few strolled among the rarely-frequented paths ; grove and garden had each their votaries. Madame Brinville, Florence, and Marie stood together, as though affording to each other mutual protection. Florence was happy, and yet there was a weight on her heart ; is not the result of all gay society, in which the affections are not engaged, to leave us in a deeper solitude, just as a man is never more lost than when he is wandering amid unknown although occupied streets.

The marquis, with his eyes full of tears of pleasure at the scene he had witnessed, and at the enthusiasm with which he had been greeted (for it seems that the wells of grief are so deep in the heart that tears naturally

flow, whether it be for joy or for woe ; no heart is so hard but that there is somewhere an Aaron's rod which at one touch can bid the waters gush from it), the marquis came up to Florence, and asked her whether she would like to see the château. It was a tribute to her youth and beauty, for who are so old as not to be susceptible to its influence ? and no homage is so graceful as that which age pays to the young, for it is homage paid to the memories of our own youth. Florence, trembling and faltering, took the arm that was offered to her, her whole form slightly bending, as with modest grace. As they turned to enter the great hall, they met Henri, who was hurrying toward the terrace. When he came suddenly on the party, a slight flush passed across his cheek. Marie was following with Madame Brinville.

“ And the play—and the play, Monsieur Henri ? ” asked the marquis.

“ I was going to tell you, Sir, that the

actors will be ready to commence directly after supper. Meanwhile," continued he, with an irresolute look, "may I offer Madame Brinville my arm to escort her over the château?"

He looked at Florence, who was at the moment busily employed in examining a beautiful fresco of the fifteenth century; he then turned round to speak to Madame Brinville, and for the first time he observed that Marie was very pale.

"You are ill, Mademoiselle," said Henri, and in one moment, to do him justice, his selfishness of transient affection was converted into strong interest for the suffering Marie. One of her crutches was falling from her hand, when Henri put his arm round her waist, to save her from falling, and carried her to a seat.

"It is nothing," she said, and over her whole features a smile of singular beauty played. The heart of the woman broke forth on her countenance at the touch of

Henri's arm. She took one glass of water, and the immediate faintness had left her ; but she was still unable to move ; the fatigue and excitement had quite overcome her. The marquis, when he saw that she had partially recovered, proceeded with Madame Brinville and Florence to the farther end of the long picture-gallery, in which they were sitting, while Henri remained by the side of Marie.

The sweet smile had now died away, and was succeeded by a kind of dread of her own emotions. There, sitting by his side, she could not but feel that between them, even while so near, there was a great gulf fixed ; she sought the direction of his gaze, as his eyes in turn followed every movement of Florence. There she moved, in the proud consciousness of beauty and of youth, of that power which appeals to our hearts like light from Heaven ; for where is there a more beautiful type of heavenly purity, than the modesty of the child united and blended

with the bloom of womanhood. She moved with a certain dignity, combined with somewhat of self-mistrust, the contrast of the simplicity of her dress with the extreme finery of the Touraine ladies, might have been attributable to the refinement of vanity, if it had been only judged of by the effect which it produced to her advantage. So Henri thought, and so Marie felt. Strange, that between hearts so wide apart at this moment, a ray of intelligence and sympathy should dart between them ; they were both fixed on the same object. "Blessed be the mother," murmured Henri, "who bore thee, so beautiful," and Marie overheard the whisper ; and she, also following the receding form, contrasted the light, the love, and the beauty she was admiring, with her own poor, frail figure ; and then she sighed, and her cheeks almost burned for very shame. "Why are some people born to be unhappy?" she thought. At that moment her eyes met Henri's, and his secret, till then unknown to himself, and

her secret so long known to herself, passed between them, and there was now no longer room for doubt. A veil was removed from Marie's eyes, and the whole truth broke upon her.

Then how bitterly she blamed what the poor child considered her folly and vanity. How low, she thought, she had fallen in Henri's eyes; and now she desired only to be at amity with him, to possess not his love, only his kindness, his regard, his sympathy. How did she ever dare to expect more?—she, the poor outcast as it were of nature, one of those who apparently form the exception to God's rule of universal good.

Still she possessed the spirit of her sex. "I am better," she said, and there was a strength in her voice which animated and supported her will. Henri felt that she was telling the truth, when she said she had quite recovered, and it was with a graceful courtesy that he offered her his arm. There

was a look almost of triumph as she approached Florence, for she had triumphed over herself—the greatest triumph man or woman is capable of.

But of all things in life, the saddest is that the strength of our purpose is often so strangely disproportioned to the energy that should sustain it; the triumph so frequently precedes the struggle, our hearts glow at the thoughts of wrestling with success; before one step has been taken towards the attainment of the object, as though in life the chief difficulty were to resolve, alas! it is too frequently the case, that when the generous enthusiasm precedes instead of follows the calm, deliberate, and self-sustaining effort, that effort rarely proves successful; only those purposes are maintained, and those objects attained, which are undertaken in a calm and deliberate manner, free from all excitement. So it was, that Marie was never really weaker than at the moment she raised her head in conscious strength. For Henri, he purposed

nothing, he only felt ; something like a tender pity for the suffering person by his side, occupied his mind ; but Florence ever stood beside it. She had been examining some picture, and was now returning down the gallery ; and as they drew near, the marquis, who had dropped his cane, relinquished Florence's arm. Henri was on the point of offering his, when a shrill voice was heard at his elbow ; it was his unwelcome aunt.

“ Henri, my dear nephew,” said she, “ I have been looking for you everywhere. I wish to walk down to the tents, to see all the people at dinner, before the play commences. It is impossible for me to go without one of the family. The marquis should do it,” added she, with a reproachful glance at her brother-in-law, “ but he is always running after any pretty face. I have known the time when people were admired as much for mind as for beauty, mais on a

changé tout cela, now nothing will do but pink and white. For my part, I think the poor little Marie is far more engaging. Allons, ma petite, don't look so pale, or I shall retract what I have been saying ; there, Henri will give you his arm : now, it is all right ; give me your other arm, Henri, and we will see how they are all getting on." And so Henri was again dragged away, and his hopes dashed to the ground.

But he soon had to leave them to make final preparations for the play which was about to commence, and shortly after, every seat was occupied. The villagers—the dinner concluded—entered the theatre, where places had been reserved for them, and then the village band tuned their instruments in a most discordant manner. Many an anxious heart beat to know what that green curtain concealed, and there were two there who only thought of Henri, who played the principal part. For the first time in her

life, Florence was to leave the world's realities for the ideal on the stage, and it was almost trembling with emotion that she listened to the prompter's bell.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLAY.

THE play represented one of those light and graceful incidents of fictitious life, which leave an impression on the heart deeper than the most highly-wrought dramas ; it was called " Love and Pride." The story was quite a simple one : a young and obscure artist loved the daughter of the governor of a province in the north of Italy, in those days when the name of Italy was synonymous with republic ; chance gave him the opportunity of rescuing the lady from a great danger at the hazard of

own life. The governor, in gratitude made him his secretary, in which post he had constant opportunities of seeing her to whom he was so much attached. The facts came to the father's knowledge, who, of course, termed a noble and virtuous passion, ingratitude. Exiled from the palace, thrown upon the world again, this young man resolved to win himself a name—that he too would be great. “Io anchè son pittore,” how many have exclaimed like that young man, but how few have afterwards succeeded. Florence, seated on the Arno, possessed at that time, as she possesses now, the finest galleries, the noblest monuments of the noblest arts, and at a time when sculptors were her ambassadors, and great painters her ministers, the proudest titles and richest prizes were bestowed as the reward of toil. The heart of the young man, whose genius had until now lain dormant, was filled with all the imagination and enthusiasm which love creates, he toiled and toiled on

through sickness and want for two years, while during that period Pauline, (for such was the heroine's name) resisted all the importunities of a suitor whose name was inscribed in the Golden Book of Fair Florence. Paul poured forth all his soul, all his passion into the cold marble, and a beautiful creation started into life. It was a period of great competition, when Michael Angelo contended with Leonardo da Vinci, and the Hall of the Grand Council now bears its evidence to be transmitted to all succeeding generations, of this glorious rivalry, when the victory was attributed to the former, but still the pictures of the latter are left there side by side to invite to disputation, as to their respective excellences. On a particular day at Florence, a wreath of laurel, such as Petrarch was crowned with in the Capitol, was to be awarded to him, who could produce the most beautiful original piece of sculpture, the master-piece of Florence. Amongst others

invited to preside on this occasion, and to crown the victor, was that very governor who had disdained the humble artist.

The long-expected day arrived, an anxious crowd entered the palace, the judges met in secret, and the scrutiny was long. At length, it was bruited about that Paul of Brescia had triumphed. Who was Paul of Brescia, the next day would decide, when the statue, placed on a pedestal, was to be unveiled, and the wreath to be placed on his brow. And that day of expectation and of interest for fair Florence dawned. The whole city was present ; and when the statue was unveiled, one loud cry of “Hail, Paul of Brescia !” arose.

It was a work worthy of a young poet’s imagining, combined with admirable skill ; but what was the surprise of him whose duty it was to bestow the wreath of laurel to see standing before him the young artist whom he had discarded, nor less so when he turned to the statue to recal in every line the features of his daughter Pauline. Trembling

with anxiety and excitement, the young artist murmured, as he knelt to receive the laurel crown, "Am I not now worthy of her love?" but a paleness of death passed over the countenance of the Prince as he muttered the words :

"Insolent ! This morning, that lady was married to another !"

Pale and trembling, like one wronged and indignant, Paul of Brescia rose.

"Insolent, Sir, to the man who will transmit to posterity a name ennobled by his own works, as yours, Sir, has been by those of others. Pauline married ! This marble shall never transmit those features to posterity !"

And in a moment, the statue lay in a thousand pieces at his feet ; and Love and Pride were vindicated in the broken marble.

Henri enacted Paul. The part he had selected suited him well ; the determination in adversity, the one sustaining idea of love recommended itself deeply to his character. Had he been the merest puppet, under all

circumstances he would of course have been loudly applauded ; but as it was, his success was genuine.

At the period we are writing of, private theatricals were in great vogue. Even a statesman like Mr. Fox, was for some years devoted to this one pursuit ; and from 1765 to about 1789 it was quite a madness. Success upon the stage for an amateur was something more than it is now, when a respectable appearance is accepted as sufficient.

Henri fully entered into the spirit of the part ; the fact is that he felt it, and without real feeling there can be no acting. In a word, the art of acting is not to act at all ; but to one who does feel and can appreciate, how great the delight to let all the heart flow forth unrestrained, through, as it were, the medium of a fictitious person. Such was the case with Henri : he was acting with Mademoiselle Julie, but the eyes he looked at were those fixed upon him in the audience ; and so, as

he trod the stage, all the enthusiasm of his character burst forth.

Mademoiselle Julie, well hackneyed in rehearsals and in the conventional passion of the stage, could by no means understand how one who had hitherto seemed so apathetic and indifferent, acted with a fervour which communicated itself to the audience. But it was at the last, when the statue was broken in pieces, and Paul of Brescia exclaimed: "Here is my monument!" that the hall rang with applause.

Florence sat there in breathless attention. How her heart had beaten when he spoke of the city of her name, as Florence, above all others, most loved and beautiful; when in the first act she saw him in despair and rejected, her heart quite sank, and she sympathised with his grief and loved him for his manly determination; in fact, no two people were ever less acting than he was on the stage, and she seated as one of the audience.

Some of the spectators behind her, complained that the intervals between the acts were too long. Florence only thought that they passed too quickly ; for she liked the play to linger, and to employ the time in recalling every expression, and every word he had spoken. Poor child ! they were only too clearly engraven on her heart, without any such effort. Marie sat, still, silent, and pale as the statue which the play represented ; and when the curtain fell, and the whole audience rose to do honour to the great actor of the night, there were no two hearts that beat quicker than Florence's and Marie's.

Mademoiselle Julie had her share of the triumph ; and Mademoiselle de Pompière explained to every person how much the play was indebted for its undeniable success to her discreet remarks and criticisms. M. de Levet was quite happy with his disjointed anecdotes about thunder-barrels, lightning propellers, kettles, fiddles, properties and decorations of a camp theatre, interspersed

with sundry little historiettes, more curious than correct, of some of the young ladies, Mesdemoiselles St. Léonie, Clarice, and the whole bevy of beauties who formed a portion of the camp of Louis XV. In a word, every one was satisfied ; and the general satisfaction produced its good effect even on the sad heart of Marie.

A few minutes, and the scene of enchantment had passed away. The lights no longer shone on the rich curtain, the elaborate heraldic achievements of M. de Levet ; and each party of friends made arrangements for retiring. In those days, people in the country were not so delicate as they are now ; most of them walked the short distances with a man to carry a lamp before them, which was certainly essential to prevent people from tumbling over the huge stones which lay scattered about on the highways. Madame Brinville, Florence, and Marie were on the point of leaving, when a rapid step was heard approaching them in the hall ; it was Henri's.

“Madame Brinville,” said he, concealing as much as he could the emotion which was apparent in his voice, “my father hopes that you will not leave without giving him the opportunity of thanking you for your visit. You know that he is soon tired : but he deputed me to tell you how anxious he is to say good-bye to you.”

“Is M. le Marquis in the dining-hall?” asked Madame Brinville.

“Yes, and he cannot leave it ; for he is quite overcome by the excitement and pleasure of this evening ; so that you will perhaps do him the favour to come and see him before you go, if, indeed, it be not too late.”

Henri had not changed his dress since the play, so he still appeared like the artist on the day of his triumph : in dark velvet, with ruffles. Instead of the broad-brimmed Spanish hat, which was the fashion with artists, he wore a small black velvet cap, from under which the hair curled in great luxuriance. He looked like one well fitted

to take his place in the gallery through which they were passing. The manly features, the light moustache gave an air of resolution and strength to features, which otherwise the fastidious might have considered too delicate and refined, just as if delicacy and refinement were inseparable from zeal and manliness.

Henri fell behind ; for at this moment he thought of Florence, and of Florence alone.

“ Stay, one moment,” he said, “ Mademoiselle,” and he stopped before a picture of an ancestor—one of those pictures which animate descendants more than ancient chronicles or black-letter histories. It represented a young officer implicated in that conspiracy for which Cinq-Mars suffered—for treason, it is true, but for treason at a time when the laws of loyalty were strangely confused by the rebellion even of those near relatives, who were the natural supports of the throne. Vandyke had painted the picture, and it represented as gallant a young

gentleman as ever bestrode a steed. He was supposed to be riding at the head of his company of La Garde de Lorraine. He, too, like Henri, who was gazing so intently at the picture, was dressed in black velvet; but he wore at the same time, the scarf and the colours of Lorraine, and a rich chain was suspended round his neck—a distinction which he had owed, to having had the honour, when yet a mere boy, to contend in the ring with his sovereign. With a light hand, he seemed to curb the charger, and with a strong hand to grasp the hilt of his sword. If, as has always been said, Vandyke painted lace so well, because his mother made it, he must have represented chivalry so powerfully, because his heart was with his sword. Around his arm was fastened a handkerchief in one of those knots to which have been given the name of love-knots, perchance in irony, because they are so easy to untie. There was the pointed tuft on the chin, the clear blue eye; the chesnut

hair, which must have won many a stolen glance from wistful damsels, was lightly thrown back from his forehead, lightly as his love might be, if field or foray claimed his presence. In one corner of the picture, a small shield contained the name, style, and title of this gay and chivalrous gentleman—Charles de Soligny, de la Garde Royale de Lorraine. How grand this sounded in those days ! Who of the Garde de Lorraine at the time that picture was painted, really imagined that they would be known, not by their deeds, but by the skill of an artist, whose mother made lace ? And yet, there it was ; the picture was the only memorial left of as gallant a cavalier as ever placed foot in stirrup.

“It is a Vandyke,” said Henri. “Is it not beautiful ?”

Florence knew but little of pictures, and scarcely had heard of Vandyke ; but there is an appreciation of excellence which all people, however limited their experience in the world of art, can attain to. Perhaps

it may be said that, in general, the appreciation of the highest order of art requires a man to be educated in its principles, and that beauties cannot be discovered by those who have never known the difficulty of expressing them ; but, on the other hand again, the ignorant possess this advantage, and a very great one—that is, that they are not so keenly alive to defects. As it was, Florence, when she looked at the picture, thought of the man it represented, and not of the artist, which is the highest compliment that can be paid to art.

At her age, it must be owned that Florence was very ignorant of history, and therefore she listened with astonishment, while Henri, who was enthusiastic about all his family traditions, told her, as he walked along, about that strange conspiracy which brought so much noble blood to the scaffold. He said “that Gaston d’Orleans met this young Count de Soligny at a château some distance from Mont d’Or, and there

Cinq-Mars joined them, when that plot was arranged, which had for its object to set Gaston d'Orleans on the throne; that Richelieu discovered the conspiracy just as it was on the eve of breaking out, and the great statesman was unmerciful as an old man could be, who was dead to every sensation except vengeance. Of all who fell on that occasion, none died more gallantly or more universally regretted than this young Count de Soligny; and the more so, as it was generally supposed that personal feelings were, in his instance, mixed up with political ones, for there had been some love passages between him and a niece of the great Cardinal Minister, which the latter had never forgotten or forgiven."

Florence looked up to Henri as though desirous to ask a question, and then timidly demanded the reason of the young officer wearing a handkerchief tied round his arm.

"Oh, I was coming to that," said he, more gaily. "Do you not know the old

cavalier custom, Mademoiselle, that, in those days, it was the habit to tie the colours of the lady who was beloved round the arm, and to wear the likeness of the features next the heart? Why should so noble and glorious a custom have fallen into disuse? for, admit it to have been a superstition—still a glorious superstition it was—which believed that some token of a pure affection could shield from harm, or stimulate to deeds of noble daring; but,” continued he, in a deeper and sadder tone—that well-known tone of sweet confidence which young hearts tremble to listen to—“as I was about to say, this young officer was on the point of marrying Constance de Bernay—a niece of the Cardinal’s—when this unfortunate event occurred; and he was sacrificed—cruelly sacrificed—merely to prevent the marriage; for, at twenty years of age, it is hard to behead a young man who is betrayed into a conspiracy, of the full nature of which he was proved to be ignorant.”

Florence’s eyes were full of tears.

“As a child,” he continued, for he was on a theme he loved to dwell upon, “she was of extreme beauty—so much so, that she was called ‘*La Belle de la Bretagne*.’ Ladies were very devoted in those days, *Mademoiselle*; and when she heard that her lover was betrayed, she followed him into that wild country beyond the Eider, where he escaped to; but unhappily he was tracked there, and discovered concealed in some ruined old château. As for the lady, there is a picture of her, which I will show you another day, if the story interest you. She is sketched in all the bloom and glory of her youth. You can imagine nothing more beautiful than those features; and it has always been said that no picture could do her justice. Her fate was as sad as her lover’s. By very large bribes, she obtained the privilege of passing the evening before his execution with him. By a strange fascination, she stood near the scaffold when the blow was struck. She did not shed a tear, but, in a few hours,

was seized with fits of trembling—the icy hand of death had touched her heart, and all she could exclaim was: ‘Cold, cold, cold!’ As his bride, she was brought to this castle, where she died, repeating these lines, which he had written shortly before his death.

“ ‘The higher still my soul aspires,
The farther seems the prize,
So falls from high the stricken bird,
Which towers before it dies.’ ”

It was said that she took poison ; be that as it may, she died so young and beautiful that her sad tale is one of those which cling to this old castle. Some pretend,” said he, laughing, “that she haunts the tapestried room, and are afraid to sleep there. For my part, I think I should wish to see any one so perfect. What do you think, Mademoiselle ?”

He turned to look at her, and then, for the first time, observed that she was almost

in tears. What a tribute to his powers of expression !

“ To call the sigh to beauty’s lips,
And tears to glorious eyes.”

She turned back to look once again at the picture before leaving, and then for the first time she thought that she observed a great likeness between the young officer and Henri. Truly, it was only her own imagination ; but if the heart is full of an object, it finds likenesses everywhere. It is, after all, but the repetition of the picture which sympathy has impressed upon the brain, and which repeat itself, whenever it can find something to cling to.

But so talking, they walked on, and entered the room where a few who still remained behind were bidding the marquis good-bye ; but when the marquis saw Madame Brinville, it was with more than even his ordinary courtesy, he rose to greet them.

“ Mademoiselle,” said he to Florence,

“your young friend, Mademoiselle Marie, or, la petite Marie, as I always call her, is so kind as to frequently come and read to an old man. If you will visit the château now and then, you will find some beautiful walks through the woods, and a great many objects of interest. The key of the different gates is kept at the entrance, you have only to ask for it; and whenever you favour an old man by a few minutes interview, I can assure you he will value them, for the minutes of a youth are prized like treasures; I know that of old.” And the marquis sighed to think of the past. “Madame Brinville will, I hope, accompany you, whenever you express a desire to come here. Am I not right, Madame? Shall we say soon, the day after to-morrow? I expect a commissioner from one of the royal galleries to examine some pictures of which the Comte de Provence desires a copy made; you will then have a good opportunity of seeing the whole collection. Will you

promise me, Madame, that I may have the pleasure of another visit ?”

Madame Brinville accepted with that hesitation which those feel who are very susceptible of kindness, but still mistrust their own position—how could it be otherwise ? It is true that she had been the victim of treachery, and her error was comparatively venial, although it had been followed by bitterest consequences. As she was aware, the secret had been well kept, for it was universally believed in the neighbourhood of the Mont d’Or that she was an honoured wife. Besides, so many long years had since passed, that few recalled the events of that period. Her father had left her, if not in affluent, in quiet, easy circumstances ; and the name of Brinville was one not calculated to excite any remark. Still, was there not some deception ? She did not venture to answer the question, but she thought that for her child even such deception, if it were indeed one, was justifiable ; and when she turned and saw the

interest expressed in Florence's countenance, she could not but accept the kind old man's invitation. And then, like the others, they departed, while Henri accompanied them to the great gates.

"Beneath this motto," said he, and he pointed up to an old scroll, on which was inscribed one of the family mottos: 'sub cruce candido,' you will always find a warm welcome, Madame Brinville. May I ask you only in return, sometimes to allow me the pleasure of calling on you?"

Madame Brinville's reply was lost in the rattle of the wheels.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOUBT AND DARKNESS.

IN one direction from the château, a long avenue of chesnuts stretched down to a small hamlet almost entirely composed of the residences of old servants, who had been in one shape or another attached to the service of the proprietors of the château, and who after a certain period of service were always pensioned off. It was always a favourite walk with the Abbé Louis, who maintained that space and a wide extent of prospect expanded his imagination when he was disposed to

meditation, and afforded ampler scope for the development of the fancy. Here and there some of the trees had been removed, in order to open out the view ; and those glimpses afforded a prospect even more extensive than that which could be obtained from the terrace of the château. It was truly pleasant at mid-day, during the extreme heat, to sit at the foot of one of those old trees, and watch the waving outline of the blue hills beyond Azay-le-Rideau, the vast extent of forest over which the mists seemed to roll, like blue waters round green and pleasant islands ; the Loire, so soon to be baptized “le torrent révolutionnaire,” now peacefully flowing onward ; and in the far distance beyond forest and hill, but not beyond the poet’s eye, Nantes, associated with the Edict of Toleration, but with the still more memorable Edict of revocation—that fatal error which stamped the character of a great sovereign, which history cannot extenuate, or the wildest fanatic vindicate.

He who sat on that terrace was one well

able to read the history of the Past in the dark châteaux of the feudal times which were dotted over the whole country ; it was his delight to watch them and contrast them with the peaceful repose of the vale over which they towered, or to mark the white sails of the various vessels which floated down the Loire, and then indulge in those dreams of man's glorious mission, to which all ardent imaginative minds are so prone.

As he sat there on the morning after the fête, the abbé was evidently contemplating the scene with something more than idle satisfaction ; his hat had been thrown aside, and with his head on his hands, he was apparently quite absorbed in thought. There was at all times an earnestness in the manner of the abbé that impressed all who met him ; he was a thorough man, one of those whose whole heart is in whatever work he meditates, however unimportant. What his hand found to do, he did — and effectually did it—and did not place the

weight of his finger wherever he could lay the full force of his arm.

On the previous day he had mingled in all the amusements of the Castle, and no one more heartily; and yet, in truth, this was only through a strong mental effort, for to all men who think and feel deeply, life is a tragedy; they are always contemplating it, as one day our spirits shall contemplate it, as a dream; they seem, like the Stylite of old, to view from the lone heights of their mental solitude all those shadows which are hurried so quickly forward into the abyss of eternity. Such men hear voices we cannot hear, and read signs which we cannot read; for them there is ever a handwriting on the wall, and the words are full of purport and dread. So each man fulfils his destiny. To some it is given to enjoy life, but, by retributive justice, that life which men linger in with pleasure passes more rapidly—how far more rapidly—than that of those whose souls are devoted to the con-

templation of the sad problems of the human race. But to such a one as the Abbé Louis, even sorrow is not a constant regret; there is to him a hope of higher happiness, than that which is in so many cases composed of nothing more than selfish habits and pallid anxiety.

As he sat there buried in his thoughts, Henri, who had strolled out, stepped lightly behind him, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

The abbé started like a man aroused from his abstraction, and violently, as though some rude hand were desirous to seize the thought from him; and the disturbance which he had experienced, contracted his brow, and called a light colour into his cheek.

“You are up early after your revels,” said the abbé, with an effort at gaiety, which at the moment sat ill upon him. “You achieved a triumph last night, and are probably come here to enjoy its contemplation.”

The young man raised his head with some-

what of an effort, when he saw that the abbé's gaze was so steadily fixed upon him; he accepted the seat which was offered him on the root of the tree, and then said, with a steady voice and inquiring glance, which made the abbé turn his head :

“ Is it true, M. l'Abbé, that you are thinking of leaving us ? Can it be possible that you will part from all those who are now so dear to you ? Every one says that it is so, but I cannot believe it.”

This time it was the turn of the abbé to remain for some time silent.

“ Henri,” said he, much touched by the expression of the young man's voice, “ I can tell you nothing now, except that I love this place, and that the bitterest time in my life will be, when I leave it.”

“ Then you do think of doing so ?”

“ It is very true,” said the abbé, “ that I have been offered the superiorship of the order of Benedictines in the monastery of La Meilleraye and I ought to accept it, the

more so that, at this time, such a situation is not unattended with difficulty, and even some risk. You are aware that, about a month since, an attack was made upon the monastery by a mob from Tours; the men were pacified, and induced to depart. But that is not the worst; there is no doubt—and I tell it to you, Henri—that a certain evil spirit has grown up in the church, and that we have within our pale some who would not much regret to see its altars overthrown. There are even a few such at La Meilleraie now. If I have been selected for the post of Superior, it is that I am judged a fit person to govern such men, and to direct their services throughout the country, in these troublesome times.”

“I have good hope for the future,” said Henri, “in the sense of the people, and the kind feelings of the upper classes. Look, for instance, at yesterday, what could be more touching than these poor people hurrying to

pay their respects to the marquis. Can you, can any one, imagine that this feeling, which has been the growth of centuries, can be uprooted in a moment? Paris may be in a dangerous state, but even there I am sure the people mean well, if they are only led well."

"No one," said the abbé, "has had deeper sympathies with that people, from which I sprung, than myself; but I am not blind to the future. Your class has never learnt to give way in time to correct abuses. I do not speak of your father, Henri, for he is universally beloved, but it is of the class that I am talking. I should like to remain in this place, because, I may say it, I have some authority over this neighbourhood, and I dread the future. But even now it is not too late; if there were but perfect truth, and resolute sacrifice on all sides, the state might be saved; a few months later it will be very different. The authority of the church is daily becoming sapped, the crown will soon be laid in the dust, and all because men will

not read the history of the Past, and are only guided, or rather misled, by their own vain habits of life. I regret to say that the aristocracy have at this time two great antagonists opposed to them—the people and the church.”

“The church !”

“Yes,” said the abbé, “the church. But I do not mean those members of the church who have been thrust upon it by aristocratic pretensions, these were in it, but never of it. But what I mean is, that the church, the real churchmen, feel that they have never been properly supported by the State. At this very moment the church possesses, as it were, no mission, no independence. If Louis XI. gave something to the church, François I. confiscated it. Pillaged by the nobles, the church has at all times been held up to the odium of the people. All that we can hope to do now, is to uphold our own, to maintain our faith inviolate ; and for that object, as I have said, it is proposed that I, an

humble instrument under Providence, should proceed to La Meilleraye.

“Surely,” continued he, after a pause, as if thinking aloud, “it is a great and noble work, were I to undertake it. The church will, I hope and believe, come out of this trial, and be stronger from it. After all, that church in its worst, in its most corrupted state, loved the people, and was regarded by the people with affection. It should be so, for it was the church that first taught nations there was equality in the eyes of Heaven, and peace in the grave. Who declared to them that all men possessed equal claims to humanity, if not the church? Surely the people will now sympathize with it.”

At this moment some clouds, which had hitherto obscured the view, passed away, and the two beautiful towers of the cathedral of St. Martin of Tours, appeared in the far distance, rich and decorated memorials of the Past. They seemed at that moment to vin-

dicate the truth of all that the abbé was saying. Built by Charlemagne, they still remained perfect. They had survived heresies, persecutions, civil wars; they stood the silent witnesses of the faith, ever pointing heavenward.

“Very beautiful, are they not?” said the abbé, reading what was passing in Henri’s mind. “Now you will understand my saying that the church will survive as it has survived the worst of all shocks, corruption within its own pale. You start, but it is even so. It is true that, in the early days of the church, fishermen were her apostles, and the sainted men, to whom religious edifices were to be dedicated, sat at the seat of custom; but tell me, Monsieur Henri, is this the church of the eighteenth century, when it is made a mere trifling aristocratic profession? Are great dignitaries now best known for their virtues or for their lordly titles? Ah! true, we retain to bless us, the memories of good men, of great and good

men, such as the church cherishes, our Bosquets, Fénelons, and Pascals, all worthy of love, despite any peculiarity of tenet. But take the church now, and I cannot think that the clergy in general dignify the profession."

There was a long pause, during which the abbé seemed to be recalling his mind to the original point whence the conversation started. And Henri, also, was silent, reflecting on all the abbé had said.

"I am partial to this seat," at length continued the abbé, after a pause, "because from no other spot with which I am acquainted in this neighbourhood, do so many objects present themselves which give rise to contemplation; from hence, for instance, I look at the woods that surround princely Chambord, the palace which represents that age and style which is so arrogantly termed La Renaissance. I presume it means when men were passing from the barbarism of the feudal ages (that is from the worst period of feudalism, for feudalism still exists) to the

refinements of a voluptuous, but graceful and selfish existence. I will admit, if you will, that Chambord is a most beautiful creation : none can be more so ; the light and open balustrade, the elaborate architecture, the flying buttresses, the minarets and towers, all captivate the fancy ; and then within, what can be more exquisite than that spiral staircase, so combined that no two persons ascending or descending at the same time can see each other ? It is well for the poet gazing on all this to recal the pageant, the beauty, the smiles of affection, the elegant refinements of a chivalrous and golden age. You smile, Henri, as if my profession precluded me from entertaining the interests of literature and history ; in this you are wrong. As a church is universal and catholic, the studies and experience men bring to it should be catholic and universal ; and it is at once with a smile and a sigh I read of a Past which is touched with such prismatic colouring ; no history so noble and interesting, I will

grant you. Mark François I., that type of grace, and princely bearing, but, alas! of womanly weakness, how he sacrificed this church whose interests we are now discussing. I fear me, Henri, that it is very hard to be in the happiest of times a great and good man—that is, to be great among men, and at the same time good among men. Well did Monsieur de Sève reply to the Emperor Charles V. when he was meditating one of those political steps which compromise the honour and dignity of manhood, for the sake of some temporary success: ‘Si je viole cet engagement, que deviendrait mon âme?’ said the Emperor,—‘vous avez un âme,’ repartit M. de Sève, ‘abandonnez l’empire.’ No, Henri, love these records of the past if you will, but only cling to what is noble amongst them. You may think that the priest should ever be near the altar, but I tell you that no sermons are more powerful than these broken marbles, and no cathedral in its glory can speak to the heart in such solemn accents

as these moss-grown palaces in their ruin. Go, if you will, to Chambord, and wander amid that labyrinth of hall and gallery ; look at the emblems of chivalry and love which are scattered with profusion over all the walls and doors ; the Salamanders of François I. and the device of Henri and Diane de Poitiers I can picture it all, at what time Brantôme spoke love essays, and there were joyous glances, smiles of wit, and eyes sparkling with wine. The poets told them to gather roses, that time was short, or, bolder still, that life for them had no decay ; that each rose possessed charms, even after its flower had past away.

“ ‘ Ne tenez plus tel desconfort,
Jeunes ans sont petites pertes,
Votre âge est plus mûr et plus fort,
Que les jeunesses mal expertes.

“ ‘ Boutons serrés, roses ouvertes,
Passent trop légèrement,
Mais du rosier les feuilles vertes,
Durent beaucoup plus longuement.’

“I speak to you, Henri, in a manner I would to few; but I wish to prove to you that a man in my position should sympathize with all human passions, weaknesses, and necessities; I would not therefore close my ears when youth exclaims in all its glow of enjoyment: ‘Welcome love! welcome revel! Let chivalry draw the sword, and let beauty live for love! Gentle ladies, brilliant courtiers, noble disputants, all, all, welcome!’ History shall speak of this as the age of the Renaissance, now is the field of the cloth of gold; in this age a young sovereign retrieved a Pavia, and fairy palaces rose on all sides ‘as by the stroke of an enchanter’s wand.’ All around is full of beauty; lightly love and lightly pledge; let time pass before us ever graceful and ever blooming; this is Chambord; but even as we speak, the veil of years falls in many folds around its charms. Again we gaze on another Chambord! on this Chambord! on my Chambord! Henri, on yours. The

Chambord of the present, not of the past ; of experience, not of history. A Chambord with moss-grown courts, with devices broken and decayed, with silence in the halls of revelry. History solemnly protests against her own records, death has passed the portal and holds her dominion in the palace.

“ We have spoken of the past and the present, but, most serious of all, is the future. The future, whether it be for man individually or the future of nations ; the past, whatever that may be, is a volume that has been read ; we may repent, we may regret, but it has been accomplished. The future, however, we have still the means of retrieving. What then, I ask, will be the future history of these noble châteaux ? for they must remain, the monuments and landmarks of succeeding historians, as they have been of the past. If changes such as I sadly anticipate, such as I am sure are inevitable, do actually occur, these old châteaux will be

the first to feel the shock ; and the day may still come when the last stone of that Chambord, the glory of which, in its perfection, may be judged of by its ruin, may fall to the soil whence it rose, and strangers ask to be shown the site of the once far-famed palace !”

“What a sad and gloomy prediction !” said Henri.

Sad and gloomy indeed, but the times justified such forebodings ; the movement of Paris had even at that time penetrated into the provinces ; and hamlets, obscure and secluded as Mont d’Or, had heard the echoes ; grave questions were debated in every cabaret. The marquis was beloved ; so were his family—none more so ; but even the memory of kind actions was not sufficient to arrest the progress of public opinion. The abbé said and felt the truth, that grievance generates rebellion, and that rebellion once commenced, cannot be appeased except by living heca-

tombs. Where he was in error was, in thinking that the church was rooted in the sympathies of the people.

And yet, never was court more correct, never monarch so right-judging, and queen, at one time, so beloved. When Marie Antoinette, on her first arrival at the Tuileries, stood at the balcony to observe the multitude of joyous countenances below, she said to the Duc de Choiseul: "Monsieur le Duc, je n'oublierai jamais que vous avez fait mon bonheur"—"et celui de toute la France," was the enthusiastic but in no way exaggerated reply. By what strange process was it, therefore, that a few short years could so overcloud this bright prospect, that the once-loved was rejected, and all the good intentions could not win any sympathy? There must have been something very hollow in that society. It gave forth a sound like that which proceeds from hollow but beautifully variegated shells: and yet the country seemed so cheerful and

happy, it was difficult to realize approaching danger,

“ Ah qu'il fait beau dans ces bocages,
Et que le ciel donne un beau jour !
Le rossignol sous ces tendres feuillages,
Chante aux échos son doux retour.”

So it was ; and nowhere were such words sung more joyously than in the Touraine. But who would pretend to say how long such peace would endure ?

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY SAT BY THE FOUNTAIN.

“HENRI, what are you and Monsieur l’Abbé in such close conversation about?” said a shrill voice behind them. “Here is poor Japhet, who has been chattering away to you for the last half-hour, and you have not listened to him, n’est-ce pas, mon mignon, n’est-ce pas, mon petit gentil,” and Mademoiselle stroked Japhet’s back in an endearing manner, while he amused himself by diving into the mysteries of her cap.

“You are very ungrateful, Henri,” con-

tinued she, not waiting for any reply to her previous question. "I invited you to walk with me to Mont d'Or, to see Madame Blanchard, who, *la petite* told me last night, was not at all well;—and now Marie must come up to the *château* immediately. A whole pile of papers has arrived, containing an account of the opening of the states-general, and what do you say to this, M. l'Abbé?—the king loudly applauded by all, in spite of a cry raised by a few of Orleans à jamais; you will soon learn how much the king and queen are beloved in France.

"The papers say that the procession was magnificent, the nobles never looked grander," she continued, for it was a point which forcibly captivated her imagination. "In their white plumes, rich embroideries and laces; and his Majesty, he wore the grand *manteau royal*, and a hat covered with feathers, which sparkled with diamonds. Ah, it must have been a grand sight! And the ridiculous *tiers-état*, in their plain, black, vulgar dresses. A glorious

day for France, is this 5th of May, is it not, M. l'Abbé?"

"I have not yet seen the paper," replied the abbé, "but I think that the grandeur of such a spectacle must be rather in the unknown which lies beyond it, which can at any time add dignity even to the most vulgar contrivances of drums and trumpets, rich draperies, golden fringes, and military array; pardon me, Madame, but it strikes me that there must have been something in the black cloaks of these mere deputies of the people, more striking and more imposing than the magnificence of the nobles, or of the higher orders of the clergy. May I ask where did the clergy walk in the procession?"

"Ah, ah, Monsieur l'Abbé, I fear that you will be very much displeased, but the paper says that a wide space separated the archbishops and bishops in the rochet and camail, from the inferior clergy."

The abbé looked at Henri.

"The aristocratic principle to the last.

Did I not tell you well, M. Henri, that the church had to fear more from the upper classes, and the ambitious within it, than from the people without ?”

“ But come away, Henri,” said the impatient lady, “ Monsieur l’Abbé will keep us arguing all day. I advise him to go and read the papers before Marie arrives, when the marquis will never allow them to be laid down until every word is spelled through, and you will not have too much time, for I shall send her up immediately. And now we are off.” And she held out the tips of her fingers to the abbé, who did not think it necessary to comply with the courtly usage, of taking them daintily in his hand, and conveying them to his lips.

As soon as he was out of hearing, Mademoiselle de Pompière’s indignation burst forth.

“ How can you talk to that fool, Henri, always with his nonsense about the people !

Le peuple si bon, si doux. Ah! he will learn a lesson some day. And then the stupid De Levet, who thinks it clever to repeat all he says at second-hand. Well! thank goodness, the De Solignys and De Pompières have survived many convulsions. As for your father, Henri, I think that he is quite absurd; he is beginning to get into the same strain. Why, all you have to do is to take care that the people have plenty to eat, and let them open their lips to eat, and for nothing else. But what impertinence on the part of the abbé! Did you see, Henri, when I offered him my hand, that he did not take it? Such manners! Ah! good manners are quite out of fashion. I can recollect the time, Henri, when abbé's knew how to address a lady; but it is all changed. I am very glad to be no longer at court, when courtly manners have departed."

They had strolled down the hill by the burn-side, which fell in cascades through the wild glen that skirted the avenue on one

side. The cool, refreshing stream harmonized with the stillness of the mid-day. As they walked on, Henri had no trouble in talking, or even in listening. All he was called upon to do, was every now and then to drop a note of interrogation or admiration. The language of the abbé rang in his ear; but it was only an echo, for his heart was far away in the future; and first in that day-dream of the future—and most beautiful in that future—stood Florence. As artists tell you that no landscape can be in drawing, unless one object stands out as the principal, so is it with the heart. None can be in proper harmony, unless it possesses one prominent object; it may be an object associated with fame and glory, or nobler than all, for it ennobles all, with love, the spiral round which all the others wind.

Although Mademoiselle de Pompière leant on his arm, Florence was ever walking by his side, when the shadows of the wide-spreading

chestnut fell around him ; or when he passed from the shadows to the sunlight, it seemed that the shadow and the light alike represented his frame of mind—at one moment bright with hope and happiness, at another darkened by the clouds of the future.

He was in a strange frame of mind, that young man. The voice of one who he had been taught to revere and respect, sounded in his ear, warning him that a time was coming when all men's energies would be required ; entreating him, as it were, to be up and doing, for the day was far spent, and the night was at hand ; and then side by side stood the countenance of Florence, as he saw her last night. That countenance, how it beamed when the words of Molière were quoted in the prologue !

“ Un soupir, un regard, un simple rougeur,
Un silence est assez pour expliquer un cœur,
Tout parle dans l'amant et sur cette matière
Le moindre jour doit être une grande lumière.

Ah qu'il est bien vrai, que ce qu'on doit aimer,
 Aussitot qu'on le voit, prend droit de nous charmer,
 Et qu'un premier coup d'œil allume en nous les
 flammes,

Où le ciel en naissant a destiné nos âmes."

Strange, truly, does it seem. Here was a young man, who had passed some time in Paris, was acquainted with all its gayest haunts, and had flirted with many of its prettiest faces, falling in love, at once, with a young girl, little more than sixteen, whom he chanced to meet in the country ; for that he was in love who can any longer doubt. When he wandered on the terrace, it was not, as the abbé imagined, to meditate on past triumphs, but on a future one, which he felt that he should prize far above all the others. It is, however, generally the case, that men are seldom so susceptible and impressionable as when their feelings are touched accidentally.

"I am quite faint with the heat, Henri," said Mademoiselle, as they approached the

entrance of La Belle Etoile. "I shall go into this room, and do you run for Marie. Don't call Madame Blanchard ; she does not understand me. Marie is the only person who has any real sympathy for my nerves. Madame Blanchard is a good woman, but she is always a housekeeper, while Marie quite understands me. You are sure to find Marie in the garden, Henri ; tell her to bring her work, and to sit in this room with me. It is far better for her than broiling in the sun. But, above all, don't bring her mother ; she is too civil. I require delicate attentions, such as I experienced at the court of his most Christian Majesty. Did I ever tell you, Henri, what Louis XV. said to me ?"

But Henri, who knew what was coming only too well, with more earnestness than he in general evinced when these attacks of nerves came upon her, left the room, as he said, to seek Marie. He recalled the precise spot where, on a former occasion, he had seen her and Florence sitting in the garden.

There was much hope in his countenance, mixed with some fear, as all great hopes are, as he turned down the walk in the garden, so sweetly scented, at the end of which was the small arbour: in one glance he had possessed himself of every flower, so impressionable is the brain when excited by passion. He caught a glimpse of a figure seated there, and his heart beat rapidly; but it was suddenly checked when he saw that Marie was alone.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, and not without an effort, “my aunt is in the room on the ground floor, and wishes to see you. Will you allow me to lead you there?”

Marie took the crutch which lay beside her, and rose, not without pain; for a moment the selfishness of human nature overpowered her. She felt that Henri had not courage to ask where Florence was, although she, with a woman’s instinct, was well assured that at this moment he would have given much to know. But in an instant

she who could not conquer the physical weakness conquered the mental one.

“You find me quite deserted to-day, Monsieur Henri. Madame Brinville is unwell, and Florence—”

“Where is she?” asked Henri, with a total loss of his habitual self-command.

“She told me,” said Marie, “that she was going down to the old manor-house, and that she should return soon.”

As she spoke, she pretended to be examining a flower—a moss-rose. Her cheek was flushed, a tear stole down it; but flush and tear, even if Henri had noticed them, would have brought no conviction to his mind. He was full of one idea, and of one alone, so all the others were mere shadows.

And yet he liked Marie very much, so he took one of her crutches in his hand, and placed her hand within his arm—the man within conquered self. He represented, at that moment, the universal respect of a gen-

tleman for all women. For one moment, she felt truly happy—ah, it was but for one moment!—for the full truth flashed upon her—il n'y a que des instans dans la vie des hommes comme dans la vie des nations.

Directly he had assisted Marie into the room where he had left his aunt, he pretended to leave for the purpose of looking after the carriage, for which a boy had been dispatched; and then he hurried towards the old house. He knew he must find her there, or meet her on her return. At this moment, he was heedless of everything save the world within himself—he was a lone planet, wandering in an atmosphere of his own creation. His heart certainly beat with anxiety as he approached the manor-house—and we well know that anxiety is twin sister to love—and then it occurred to him, how was he to explain this visit? He had no message to give, no communication to make to her; would it not appear a somewhat abrupt and strange proceeding to follow her

into a garden where she had probably retired for seclusion ? and if Madame Brinville were with her ? if—

As generally occurs in life, nine times out of ten, while we are planning, and scheming, and arranging events in the order in which we expect them to occur, what we shall say, do, or perform, something falls out unexpectedly to upset all our elaborate calculations ; so it happened, just as he was considering what he should say or whether or not he had better return, he looked, and there was Florence.

Henri glanced round, and they were alone.

And then all the set phrases, all the formal excuses were forgotten ; and he stammered out some absurdities which she did not understand, but of which fatigue, long evening, and inquiries formed the staple. In fact, the man of the world, before this unworldly child, was stupified by the excess of his consciousness.

But after a long pause :

“The day is warm. I hear, from this distance, the murmur of the fountain which you spoke of. I have never visited it—will you take me to see it?”

It was the fountain that her mother had frequented and loved when a child, and so Florence was wont to visit it from sympathy ; but not only for that reason, but because at the same time it was the sweetest spot in that delightful solitude—so peaceful and secluded, that the light fall of the water was still audible, while the heart beat in unison ; there banks of roses were no rare exceptions, interspersed with those sweet flowers which Southern climes cherish, and which cannot be transplanted and live ; and the perfume of these flowers floated around, and the hum of summer insects filled the air, as though to live and to love were the whole business of nature. Who could believe it to be otherwise in the Touraine in May—in the Touraine, seated near her beloved in May.

Listless and languid observations passed. Florence spoke of the play, but not of the actor. Why is it that there is an instinctive feeling which so often bids us shun the subject next the heart, just as warmth deserts the loftiest mountains, where the craggy peaks approach nearest the source of light?

Oh, bliss without compare! for which man would give up all his dreams of ambition and glory in any one of the thousand shapes in which Fame presents herself to the ardent imagination—to feel the dawn of a new light and a new life breaking upon the heart, gradually and beautifully expanding as the moments creep on—to feel that a new and hitherto undiscovered world of sensation has been laid open to us. True it is that others have written on the theme, have endeavoured to explain it away, have declared that all is vanity; but what matters this? The adventurers of old still sallied forth in search of new discoveries and

conquests—after Columbus had planted the flag of Spain in a new world, and Cortez had founded a province where an empire had stood—they still sought, despite the disappointments and broken hopes of the many, fresh spots of virgin beauty where the sun should ever shine, and where the smallest streams were impregnated with gold ; and ye adventurers in the heart's hidden mines of wealth, ye who faint not in your search after the priceless good, what avails it to tell you of countless disappointments, of exhausted energies, of long labour lost, of broken hearts, and wasted hopes ? Ye will ever struggle on—the hope is in the heart, the energy is in the youth which blooms within you, your faith is in the omnipotence of love.

And these two sat by the fountain—a second generation sat by the fountain. It bubbled as it did before, and their hearts beat as others beat before. Strange thought ! look at any pleasant stream rippling through a glen, and think how many tears may have

been shed near it since first its waters flowed from their source—what expectations, what visions, what hopes have been cherished on its banks, what loves, what sad and pleasant thoughts has it heard, ever murmuring—ever murmuring as it ripples onward in its progress to the ocean.

So they sat by the fountain, and they talked of light subjects in a light strain, but always with some thought, some deeper purpose lingering behind. As the wind, when it rises in fitful gusts, touches the Æolian wires and a melody is produced, so the heart has its chords, and every word that passes over them produces a distinct melody; and ever and anon soft breezes, perfume-laden with the gifts of spring, played around them like idle fancies. Youth, and Beauty, and Love! can there be a principle of decay in so glorious a birth?

There are moments—rare felicities indeed—but there are moments in which, as it were, the heart's affections stand still for a time, and

lighten with their glory all the world of thought within us. Such are the moments when, for the first time, we feel that our heart's throbs are responded to by another. So it was at such a moment, all Henri's doubts, fears, and perplexities passed away : confidence in the future sprang up within him. The test of love is confidence in presence, and anxiety in absence.

Blessed are the attributes of womanhood, when the chiselled feature, the dimpling smile, the cadence of the voice, and the tangled locks of graceful auburn, are all emblems of qualities which angels love to name in their prayers ; the features of repose, the smiles of hope, the voice of sympathy and love, ever-varying in its expression, like the impulses of a graceful nature. Blessed was she who first uttered the words, " I love ;" for from her lips a spirit went forth more potent than any that magician could invoke—a spirit that, like the prophet's rod, could bid the waters flow from a heart of rock — that

called forth flowers of beauty in soil parched as Araby's ; that rent asunder those most potent of all bonds, the bonds of artificial vanities. That which ambition could not achieve, love conquered ; indolence, satiety, vanity—above all, selfishness—the long train of frivolities and vices, all bowed before the spell which the woman called forth.

They had risen from the seat, and mechanically strolled down the path that led to the burn-side. At one point, a beautiful view of the old château presented itself. It was the side on which it rose, as though it were a portion of the rock on which it was built. From the windows on this side, any one could look down upon the torrent below ; thence the brushwood had been cleared away, so as to show the whole façade. The flag-tower frowned above ; and loftily above the tower, the ensign of France floated—with those golden lilies which the oldest of sovereign houses were proud to assume in their arms. A slight gloom passed across Henri's

countenance, while Florence's beamed with pleasure, as the magnificent view burst upon her. What was the cause of this different expression? They were both of them at once recalled from the world of imagination ; but he to a sense of the obligations, she to a keener sense of the beauties of nature.

Then for the first time, there flashed across Henri's mind all the social ties which he inherited with his great position ; the pains and penalties of a high station presented themselves to him ; he felt—for he could no longer be deceived as to the nature of his feelings for Florence—he felt that there were difficulties in the way of his indulgence of those feelings, which until then he had never contemplated. Kind as the old marquis was, he well knew his tenacity on all matters connected with his family position and illustration. Between himself and Florence, therefore, it seemed at once that a deep gulf was fixed, wider and even less easy to pass, from the circumstance that it had no real

existence—that if there were a difficulty, it was founded in prejudices and vanities. Yes, and what is more difficult to overcome? Men's prejudices and passions, when we mention them, are we not raising at once obstacles of more than giant proportions?

But she smiled happily, for she had no such imaginations. When women love, they only feel, and do not reason. If a woman's emotion be a pure one, it rises spontaneously in the heart, like the spring in some dell or secluded glade, and then at once ever flows on, endowing with its beauty, musical in its harmony, and calling forth teeming beauties through whatever soil it passes, ignorant that it may one day either become a mighty current, possessing all the elements of greatness, and bearing in its bosom the destinies and fates of men; or that it may subside and die away uncared for and unknown, like those rivulets by the banks of which the traveller wanders; when suddenly, as he looks round, he finds that the water has

sunk into the earth, and nothing but a dry and thirsty channel marks the spot where the waters once flowed.

Florence did not reflect on the difference of class and rank, for she did not understand the value of such superiorities. Having mixed little in the world, she was not aware of the importance which the world sets on social distinctions. She knew there were different grades, but she thought, and truly thought, that as each grade had its obligations and duties, the performance of these, in whatever sphere a person was placed, ennobled him. The disparity of condition, therefore, did not flash upon her as it did on Henri when he looked on the château, where his forefathers had resided for many centuries.

Neither did she notice something different in the voice when he again addressed himself to her, when he suggested that it was time he should return to the hotel; and if she were going that way, he would accompany her. It was an abrupt conclusion to the

meeting—that first meeting in which so often the secret of our life is contained—that meeting in which never-to-be-forgotten words are spoken—that first meeting which in life we would ever recal, and to renew which it were even well to live again.

So felt Florence, as in silent thought she left the garden, and the gentle flow of the waters again fell on her ear, as they passed by the fountain.

CHAPTER XIX.

LA BELLE ÉTOILE.

THERE is something so magnetic in human nature, that most people are in general impressed with the idea that other persons can divine their thoughts and actions, that which we ourselves have thought, desired, or accomplished, rises before us like the spectres which are seen on lofty mountains, moving when we move, stopping when we stop. In life these spectres of ourselves are ever present, and frequently alarm us more than stern realities ; but it is especially the case when the heart is

interested. No one was ever yet in love who did not imagine that all the world knew it. No one ever yet left the presence of any one to whom he was attached without an instinctive apprehension that every person whom he might chance to meet was penetrating his soul, and more or less sympathizing with him. Painful weakness! For each man in this world is in the same manner occupied with himself; each woman goes forth thinking of her own charms, and not of yours. Ah! unless you be a rival, or one of those unfortunates on whom the world loves to avenge itself for its own misdeeds — unless you furnish the victim for the epidemic morality of fashion, you may pass on unheeded; no one will trouble himself to read your mind.

As they were leaving the garden, they met Joseph, who smiled and nodded to Florence. Partly to conceal his confusion, and partly because he began to fear that he had left *Mademoiselle de Pompière* waiting too long, Henri asked him the hour as he passed; and

to his surprise he found that he had been absent from Mont d'Or two hours. How to explain this delay was now his anxiety ; and having resolved the matter in every possible manner without coming to any satisfactory conclusion, he at last determined, as many wiser men have done under similar circumstances, to leave the explanation to chance ; but what most troubled him was, that this sense of the time he had passed with Florence recalled to him the full force of his position with her. He began to think that he had acted very selfishly and unjustly ; but on the other hand, he remembered the words of the abbé, that he foresaw a great change in the relative positions of society ; and Henri then felt that he should welcome such a change, if it only left him free to follow the dictates of his affections.

When they arrived at La Belle Étoile, they found it, to their surprise, in a state of great confusion. Madame Brinville, Florence was informed, had been seized with an attack

of illness. Poor Florence in a moment forgot all the visions of happiness which she had been conjuring up, and had only thought for that mother who had been to her as a sister. She was allowed to steal into her room, where she found Madame Brinville, much exhausted, lying on a sofa, and in a state of the deepest depression. Mademoiselle de Pompière, in her anxiety to be of some use, had, it seems, added to poor Madame Brinville's sufferings. When there was anything to be done, Mademoiselle was activity itself; the only fault she had was, that nothing was well done unless it were done under her superintendence.

It appears that Madame Brinville had received a letter from Paris, which had thrown her into a state of great distress, terminating in a fainting-fit. While Marie was sent out, as quick as the poor girl could go, to purchase every variety of soothing medicine, Mademoiselle de Pompière unfortunately thought, that if a letter was so

unpleasant as to produce such an effect, the sooner it could be got rid of, the better for Madame Brinville. Besides, in her pharmacopœia she had learned that the fumes of burnt paper were the best means of recalling persons to their senses, and the only piece of paper which at that moment presented itself to her was this letter ; so it was at once transferred from the floor, on which it lay, to the brazier, and placed so close to Madame Brinville that she was nearly suffocated with the fumes. Having performed this exploit to her own satisfaction, she commenced tickling the palms of her hands, poured bottles of eau de Cologne over her head—in fact, exhausted every expedient that the *materia medica* of her own fancy could suggest. Florence and Henri returned at the very moment when, as Mademoiselle said, her science had been attended with the happiest effects ; but Madame Blanchard had first suggested the idea of opening a window, when the pure air immediately revived the invalid.

Florence sat down by the sofa and took her mother's hand. But Madame Brinville looked anxiously round the room.

"The letter—the letter!" she exclaimed.

"My dear Madame Brinville," said Mademoiselle de Pompière, rather confused in spite of her confidence in her peculiar system, "you know bad news is best forgotten, so I destroyed the letter, and you owe your recovery to the fumes of the paper; so there was some good in it, after all. The smoke relieved the brain, and the brain once relieved, the mental process—"

She was going on very rapidly, but Madame Brinville only pressed her hand to her head, and exclaimed:

"What! you burnt the letter?"

"Yes, I told you I did so," said Mademoiselle de Pompière, who in reality began to feel somewhat alarmed, but determined to carry it off triumphantly; besides, the tone and manner of Madame Brinville implied a censure and a reproach, which was at any

time sufficient to rouse the lady's indignation. "Well, I was right to burn the letter, Madame Brinville," she exclaimed, "and you will thank me for doing it some day. The fewer letters any one gets, the better, I am sure. When I was at the court of his most Christian Majesty, I was always taught the maxim, 'Never write, and never read.' Writing and reading are the source of all our ills, mind that, Mademoiselle Florence. Many a man wished to write to me, but I soon stopped all that nonsense. 'Gare qui touche,' was my motto, and not a bad one for young ladies."

Madame Brinville appeared to be listening, while in point of fact she was wholly unconscious of all that was said; all she could look at were the remains of the letter in the brazier; then she turned her head languidly round, as though it were utterly useless to discuss the matter with one who was quite beyond the sphere of conviction.

Madame Brinville soon relapsed into her usual quiet, unexcitable state; the loss of

that letter was vital to her, for she had not observed the address of him who wrote it, and there was no possible means of discovering it; but she accepted the annoyance, as part accomplishment of that mental anxiety which she was doomed to undergo; and then she feared that Mademoiselle de Pompière was distressed at the regret she had expressed, so the kind-hearted woman put out her hand to her, which she accepted, but not in the most gracious manner. Then Mademoiselle began to make preparations for her departure; but this was no light matter, there being so many impediments to look after. In the first place, a huge bag was missing, which contained an endless variety of odds and ends; there were scraps of letters from some female moralists and friends, extracts from the court papers of former days; there were pieces of tapestry commenced with energy, but soon given up in despair; then there were packets of pins and needles, bright as the virtue they were

destined to protect, and well might Mademoiselle exclaim, guarded as she was by these defences, “Gare qui touche!” a scent-bottle which had belonged to the Pompières for countless generations, was kept in it; there also place was found for a fan, after the style of Watteau, on which were represented graceful ladies with tight waists, and enormous hoops, with very red cheeks and well-powdered hair, listening at the foot of the greenest trees to gentlemen in very tight sky-blue pantaloons, elaborate skirts, and wide-spreading hats decorated with flaming ribbons, who played on flutes and pipes, while pet-lambs and shepherds in the distance looked on with astonishment, as they well might, at the light *déshabille* in which the ladies and gentlemen of those days loved to disport themselves; then there was a little gold chain for Japhet’s ankle, whenever the wily bird suffered himself to be so ensnared, which was not often the case; but above all there was a snuff-box, a family relic

of which she was most proud ; it represented one of her ancestors leading the storming-party at Lerida, which city they besieged with flutes and dancing. A De Pompière, as was represented on the snuff-box, led the van with a fiddle in his hand, and certainly, if he had not been a De Pompière and a warrior, he must have been a dancing-master, for never was a more gracefully-turned leg or elaborate, diamond-buckled shoe enamelled on lid of box. She valued this box not only for its mere intrinsic merits—for the box really was an admirable specimen of enamel—but also because it afforded her the daily opportunity, of which she never failed to avail herself, of making her own family the topic of discussion. This M. de Pompière was knocked on the head in the middle of his most brilliant fantasia ; and, as they always did things in those days, he was buried in the same irreverent manner in which he attacked citadels. Mademoiselle was fully persuaded that this great man occupied the

proudest position in the Valhalla of history, and what between her and M. de Levet, when once they were started off on their respective histories, Plutarch himself could not have contained all the anecdotes of family prowess which they related, and twice seven champions of Christendom would not have sufficed to realize them.

Henri was not sorry at the occupation which the collection of this museum of antiquities entailed on him; it prevented Madame Brinville pressing any questions, if she were inclined to do so, and it distracted Mademoiselle's attention from the insult which had been passed by Madame Brinville on her medicinal skill.

But when he had accomplished this Herculean task, when the *débris* of a life's vanity had been replaced, each in its own repository, and Henri turned to say good-bye to Madame Brinville, he remarked the expression of her countenance. She had a sad and careworn look, which must

have been habitual, but which had never before struck him. Then there was a lustrous light in the eyes, as though they shone more brightly from the night which overshadowed the heart; the hair, disengaged from the comb, fell over her neck as it did in youth. She looked like a tired child dreaming away, albeit sadly, the memories of the Past. She said nothing more about the letter, but remained like one resigned to her destiny, whatever it might be. Mademoiselle had forgotten the whole circumstances in those anecdotes of her ancestors, which the picture of the battle of Lerida had suggested to her.

“By the bye,” said Mademoiselle, as she was about to leave, “I forgot that we are next week to make an expedition to Chénonceaux; the marquis, my brother, desired me to ask you all to join us. There will be plenty of room. I am sure it would do Madame good, Mademoiselle Florence; nothing like change of air, as Louis XV.

used to say, when he sent some of the young gentlemen to the Bastille. As for Marie, she told me the other day she wished to see Chénonceaux, and so I shall trust to Madame Blanchard not to interfere; but here is Marie.”

Marie had entered just at the moment, and when she heard her probable interest in this expedition answered for before Henri, she found it difficult to conceal her feelings of annoyance; and yet this soon changed into one approaching to pleasure, when she thought what happiness it had always been to her to listen to his kind, low, and gentle voice; for years past it had been her dream to realize in him, who had been her playmate, all the chivalrous and noble qualities. Her very helplessness and infirmity, in rendering her an object of pity, had been in part the cause of her present mental suffering; but now it was that she felt helpless not alone in body, but in mind. Was she not then still more an object of pity, and is

not pity akin to love? All this passed through her heart, and left the emotion expressed in her countenance. Mademoiselle remarked it, and asked if she was ill.

“The heat,” ejaculated Marie; and a paleness, sudden as the previous glow, overspread her countenance. Yes, she resolved to carry out her self-sacrifice. She saw the look which Henri gave her. She knew that the party greatly depended on her, and she then answered that “it would be most agreeable.”

Poor Marie! poor child! you think yourself lonely and solitary in such suffering; be not deceived! the hearts that suffer, embrace a wider circuit than any other. Go where you will, you will not be alone; you will find some who, if they cannot sympathize, can at least comprehend the nature of your sorrows. You garnered up soft and gentle ideas in your heart, and the mildew has entered there the first. You hoped to sail before a genial and favouring breeze down the stream of life

and love, and your bark has foundered in the bluest and clearest of waters. You, in your childish view of justice, fondly thought that to you an inner world of happiness would be vouchsafed ; and a full flood of Heaven's light would shine on your heart to compensate you for the loss of youth's energies ; yet do not complain ; happier are you with these thoughts of love, with these sweet visions of a future untainted by the breath of selfishness, than they whose affections are selfish and misplaced ; and who make what should be the glory of their youth the shame of their womanhood. Gentle and holy thoughts will be always yours. It is a beautiful and graceful thing to bear in your heart the image of love. There are two Arabias touching each other and the heart of each person possesses one of these. The one is beautiful, fragrant with abundance of flowers, and those green spots on which all sweet loving spirits long to repose ; and wherein those are cordially most welcomed who are most excellent and trust-

worthy ; the other is hot, arid, and feverish, parched and unwholesome, wherein no good things take root. You possess within yourself the first of these, live in it and love it ; turn from the parched, ungrateful tract of selfish, barren existence ; bid welcome to all kind feelings ; offer to others the blessings which you cannot yourself enjoy ; and learn this truth, that there is a higher one than happiness invoked for yourself, and that is happiness invoked by yourself for others.

Such were the feelings that passed across her mind, as she turned to the window to conceal her countenance when Henri left the room. Madame Brinville read the truth, and she sympathized with this heart's weariness. Marie was about to retire to her own room, when Madame Brinville prayed her to remain.

“ Marie,” said Madame Brinville, “ I have asked you to stay here while I speak to Florence ; for I am sure that, come what may, so long as you live you will ever be a most

kind friend to my little Florence, and no one can tell how soon she may require some friend who will love and counsel her. You know, Florence, something of my sufferings in life, how my—" (she would have said, "my husband," but even then she could not utter the word) "how your father, Florence, whom it is so long since you have seen, left Paris for some distant country, and what pain it has been to me to educate you as you should be educated. Well, after long years, during which I have been quite ignorant of his career, I heard from him this morning. He tells me that he has something of the utmost importance to confide to me; that he will be in Paris in a month, where we are to join him; that I was to communicate with him under cover to a M. Morel. As I read, I was seized with a sudden spasm, which resulted from the excitement, before having perused the whole letter. Mademoiselle de Pompière, as you are aware, has burnt it, and I have

now no means of communicating with him, although I am aware from what I read that the fate of his child, of my own Florence, depends upon it."

"Mother," said Florence, in a solemn voice, and an earnestness beyond her years, "you know that I have seen my father so rarely that it is impossible for me to feel for him, as I am aware a daughter should feel. It is to you I owe all duty and affection; therefore I implore you do not trouble yourself. I can never be unhappy so long as you are with me."

Madame Brinville uttered an exclamation, and gave a sudden start, which showed at once that there was some secret source of her pain and anxiety beyond that which she had just stated.

"Florence," said she, and her words were slow and pondered, as if she felt that a weight of responsibility attached to them. "Florence, I will not deceive you; it would be very wrong in me to do so. I may tell

you that the cause of my returning to this spot, where as a child I lived so happily, was that the physicians told me my native air might arrest the progress of a complaint, which is fatal, as it is rapid and sure. I only value my life, Florence, for your sake ; it is to you, Florence, I cling as to the only charm that binds me to existence.”

Here her voice faltered. Florence did not listen to the language of her mother's love, only to the expression of her voice. She laid her head on her bosom as if she were a child once more, and as she felt her mother's tears upon her cheek, her own heart sobbed as if it would break.

“Florence, Florence ! I beseech you,” said her mother. “I have said too much, but—”

Florence still wept.

“I only meant to tell you the worst, dear child ; but, on the whole, I am much better since I came here—you can see the difference. Come,” she said, in a voice, which she in vain endeavoured to render gay, “smile

again, and let us talk over our excursion to Chénonceaux next week. Will it not be pleasant, Florence?"

She had not intended to have gone to Chénonceaux; but here was the mother's weakness.

"Oh, yes," said Marie, for Florence had raised her head, and something like a smile broke through her tears. "It is very kind of Mademoiselle de Pompière to have proposed the excursion, for it will be delightful. As for Madame Brinville, I am sure that she is looking much better and stronger. We must hope that another letter will soon come to relieve her mind. We will not this day build three altars, but let us all join to erect one to Hope."

Ay, so it is :

"The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,
Delusive shine, delusive flow."

Youth must be hopeful; and Marie's

efforts at gaiety that evening were not lost ;
and she felt happier that night in having
brought smiles to the lips of those she loved,
and gladness to the hearts of the lonely.

END OF VOL. I.

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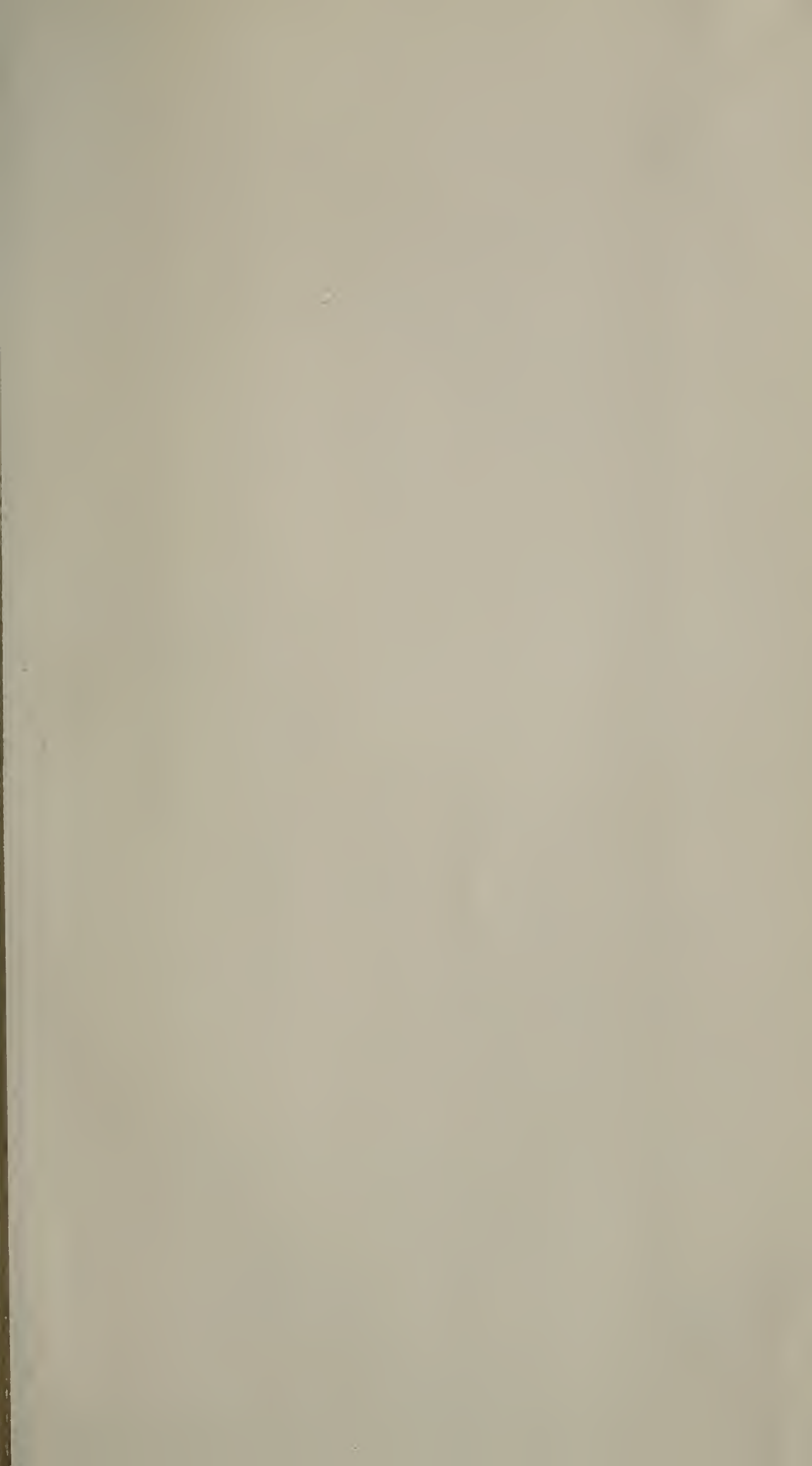
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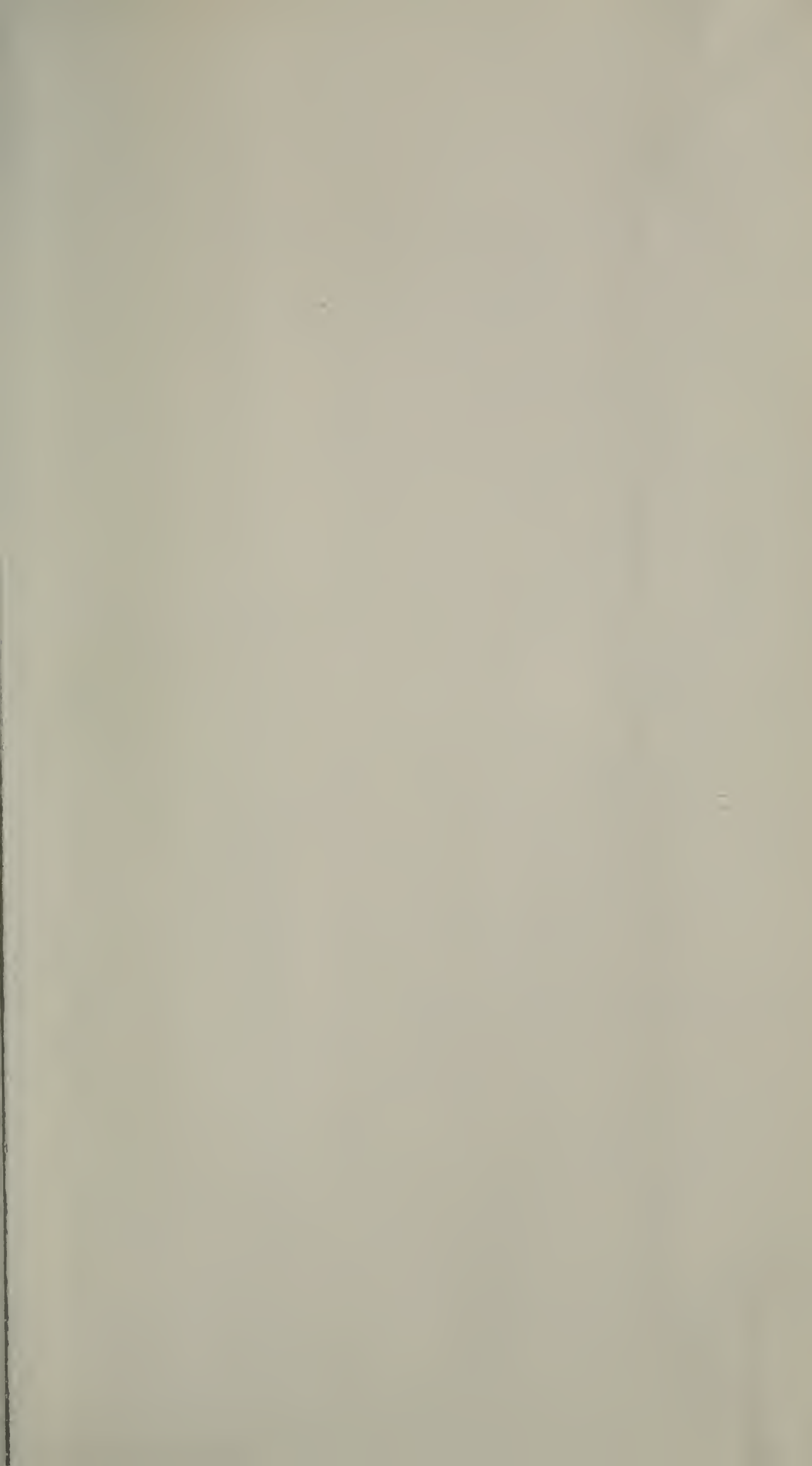
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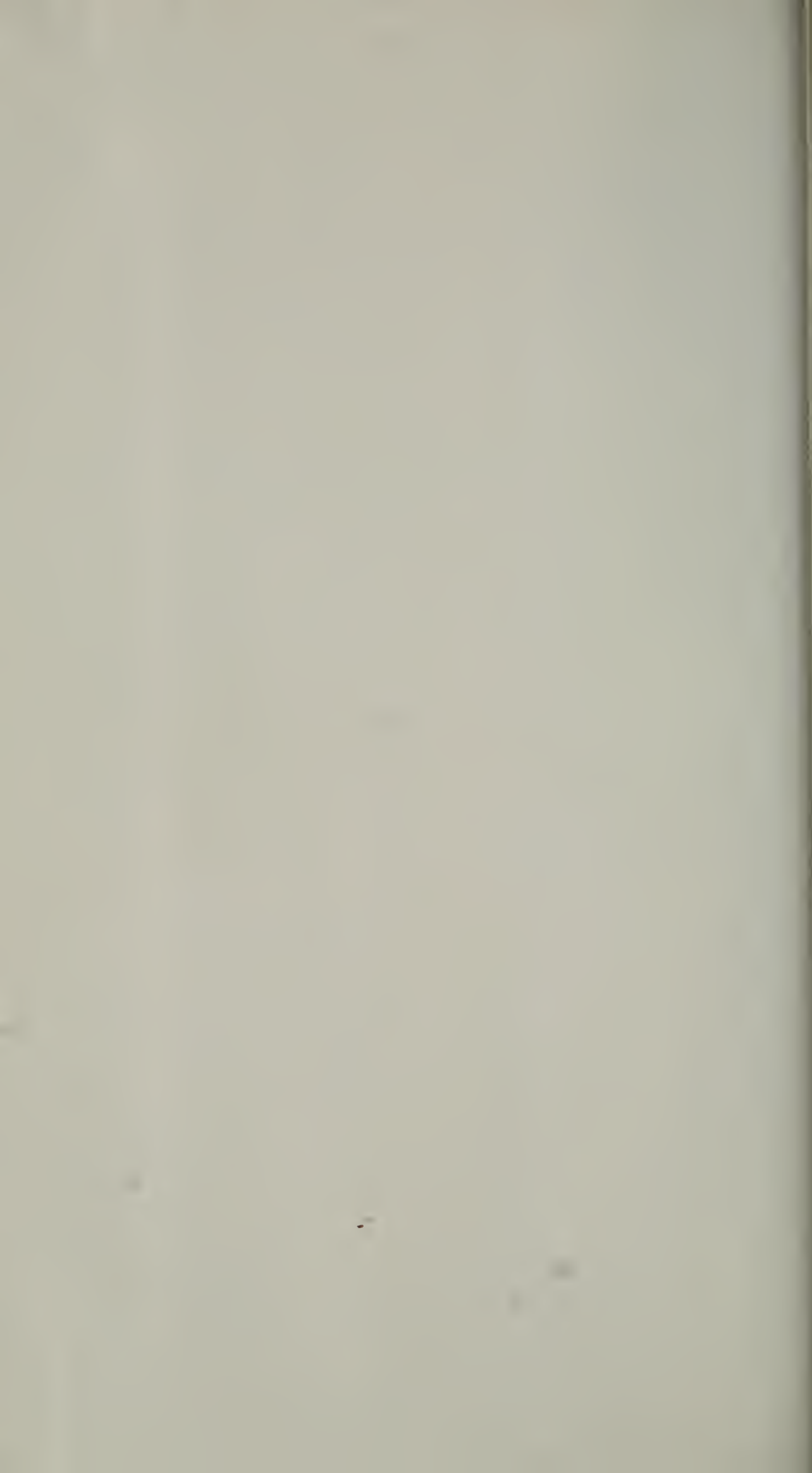
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